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Three Decades of  
Dry Creek Valley  
Interviews



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Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County Oral History Series

Three Decades of  
Dry Creek Valley Interviews  
1970-1990



Transcription 1992-93



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# Three Decades of Dry Creek Valley Interviews

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## **Introduction to *Three Decades of Dry Creek Valley Interviews***

The following oral history interviews of Eugene Cuneo and Eugene Saini, Ruth Watson, Andrew Frei, Emil Plasberg, George Rosasco and George Snider were taken from the 1970's to 1990's. They were all residents of Dry Creek Valley or had worked with the wine industry in the valley.

Walt Dieden, Dry Creek Valley grape grower, starts the volume with his interview of Eugene Cuneo and Eugene Saini. They have been successful growers for many decades and are still active in grower's organizations. The interview covers their knowledge of grape trends, winery-grower relations, and wineries in Dry Creek Valley.



**Gene Cuneo & Gene Saini  
with Mrs. Irma Cuneo**

Interviewed by Walter Dieden  
Dry Creek, Healdsburg, California  
June 20, 1990

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Walt Dieden: The following interview with Gene Saini and Gene Cuneo was taped on June 20th, 1990. The subject matter will be their recollections about the development of grapes and wineries in the Dry Creek Valley.

The first question that I will ask you is when did you or your family come to Dry Creek Valley? Specifically what years?

Gene Cuneo: Well, John Cuneo and Mike Saini purchased the original of this ranch in 1917. And then they purchased the other part in 1922.

Dieden: Now you say — could you be a little more specific about the two?

Cuneo: The partners?

Dieden: No, no where the lands are... You mentioned in Dry Creek Valley—

Cuneo: Yeah. The lands are situated about two and half miles northwest of the freeway (Highway 101) and about a mile south of the Dry Creek Store.

Dieden: Okay. How, how many acres in the—

Cuneo: The original purchase was 53 acres. And the other ranch that was purchased was 27.

Dieden: When was the second ranch purchased?

Cuneo: Nineteen hundred and twenty two.

Dieden: 1922. Okay, that's five years after the original purchase.



- Cuneo: Yes. Now, when the original ranch plot was purchased my father, John Cuneo moved here into Dry Creek and in 1922, when they purchased the other ranch, Mr. Saini and his father, Mike Saini, moved. So they moved—And then they were both working on the ranch.
- Dieden: (To Saini) Okay, How did Si get over into Alexander Valley?
- Saini: I moved nine miles — You know, that's quite a bit, in 62 years, I've gone nine miles. That's pretty good, you know.
- Dieden: (Laughter)  
Why in '17, why did these two individuals decide on Dry Creek? What was here to attract them?
- Cuneo: I do know that my father had a cousin who lived in San Jose and they were looking at a ranch in San Jose, and they looked up here and they bought this one. I guess they were both scavengers of San Francisco and I guess somebody must have told them what a rosy deal the farming was!
- Dieden: (Laughter)
- Saini: Didn't they look in Stockton too?
- Cuneo: That I don't know. I know that, they—
- Saini: They were real interested in San Jose.
- Cuneo: Yeah, they almost bought in San Jose. Then my father's brother, he lived here, down in West Grant, where Georgio's (Italian Restaurant) is now. He had the ranch there. So they ended up here.
- Dieden: What was here? Was anything planted?
- Cuneo: Oh yeah, all of the flat was prunes. And part of the bench here was prunes. And there were some grapes. And then gradually—there used to be a lot of Imperial prunes up here. And gradually they took all of the Imperial prunes out.
- Dieden: About when?
- Cuneo: Well, this was done from 1929 to 1940-'41. So then they ended up with all of the bench here in grapes. And then, '70, 1974, we started taking the prunes out of the flat down here. Then from '74 till '80, there was 26 acres and we took them all out. And so now it's all grapes.





- Dieden: It's all grapes, okay—
- Cuneo: The prune trees were dying. It wasn't, you know (making money) and the grapes had the bloom on them.
- Dieden: So, you were really involved in the major period when it was (growing), they put in grapes.
- Cuneo: Yes. He and I did all of the planting.
- Dieden: What varietals did you select and why?
- Saini: There was Alicante Bouschet because they were good shipping grapes, Petit(e) Sirah because there was a market, and Zinfandel.
- Cuneo: Carignane was a very popular one too. So then we—but then gradually all of the old Alicantes have been taken out. And uh—right now on this bench, it's over half Zinfandel, then we have Merlot which we're continuing to plant.
- Dieden: Uh huh.
- Cuneo: And there are still some old Carignane blocks.
- Dieden: You'll leave the Carignane in?
- Cuneo: Yeah, the Carignane we have now is about four acres and it'll probably come out in the next two or three years.
- Dieden: Okay. Replaced by Merlot or Zin?
- Saini: The plan is that this half of the bench will all be Zin and that what we call the other half will all be Merlot.
- Cuneo: See, then when we started to take the prunes out of the flat in 1974, we planted Grey Riesling which was in great demand. We were selling to them Wente. So then gradually the bloom went off of them and so then we T-budded the block we had in Grey Riesling to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.
- Dieden: So that is what there is now?
- Cuneo: And the other 16 acres is 8 acres of Chenin Blanc and 8 acres of Colombard.
- Dieden: Of Colombard. Do you have any plans to change those over?
- Saini: No, not now.



- Cuneo: No, because we go to Korbel with them.
- Dieden: Oh, for Champagne?
- Cuneo: Sure, they're not \$1100 a ton grapes or a thousand dollars, but they bear well and there—
- Dieden: So, there is a market for them?
- Cuneo: Oh, yeah.
- Dieden: Now, who of your respective families is involved with you, do any of your children?
- Cuneo: He has a boy.
- Saini: We do. Cuneo and Saini period own the land, and Saini Farms does the farming.
- Dieden: Okay, that means Gene Saini.
- Saini: Gene Saini and my son, John.
- Dieden: Okay, he does—
- Saini: The farming.
- Dieden: The farming, okay.
- Cuneo: You see what we do is, in '84, I, we were involved in a farming corporation together, the two of us. Then I retired and sold my half to him and his son. Then he and I own all of the vineyard, everything together and Saini Farms which was him and John, do all the farming. I just go and make a little noise once in awhile.
- Dieden: (Laughter) Okay, what would you do over? I remember that back in the '70's when all of the sudden there was a big change in interest in having white wines. Apparently you didn't fall prey to that. You still had a pretty good balance I take it—
- Cuneo: Yeah.
- Dieden: —between whites and reds.
- Cuneo: Above the road, above the road we plant nothing but blacks, red grapes, because there's demand there and we can raise



the finest Zinfandel and the finest red grapes in the country. Here in this flat, below the road, Pinot Noir, yes, and that's about the only one that will really sugar in the flat.

Now, when you ask what we would have done different. Knowing back in 1980, what has happened in the last ten years, that 16 acres should have been put in Chardonnay. But at that time too, everybody was saying, "Gee, what you're gonna do with all that Chardonnay?" But now they're saying the same thing, now what's gonna happen when the 14,000 acres of Chardonnay is out there now, that it's not bearing— But that's about the only thing that I would do differently...

Saini: And up here maybe we should have started switching to the varietals, maybe sooner. If we had to do it again.

Cuneo: Yeah.

Dieden: Well, it seems to me that you did pretty well in your selection.

Cuneo: Well, our Zinfandel is the best you can buy!

Dieden: Well I might argue with you on that one.

Cuneo: (Laughter) You might have the best one, like Clarence Walcott up here.

Dieden: Well, I'm right behind Clarence.

Cuneo: He's got about as nice a block of Zinfandel you want to see, you know.

Dieden: Well, only a 20-foot road separates our two vineyards.

Cuneo: Well see then, I'm on your side.

Dieden: I'm of the opinion that Dry Creek is the greatest place in the world to be.

Saini: Excuse me, to go back. You know the grape business wasn't like it is now, you know. You go to the winery—

Dieden: This is what I want to hear.

Saini: You go to the winery and the crusher was 60 feet long. There'd be three trucks crushing into the crusher. They were red, naturally all red. They were all three different varieties. And the price was the same.





- Dieden: For all three?
- Saini: For all three, but the tonnage was different. One you got three ton (an acre) and the Carignane you got nine ton.
- Dieden: (Laughs)
- Saini: Which you know was, does not make any sense at all. That's the way the grape business was around here.
- Dieden: Did the wineries tell you what they wanted you to plant?
- Saini: That didn't come on till the '60's.
- Cuneo: Yeah.
- Dieden: What were the relations between the growers and wineries? What wineries were here? You mentioned you sold to Korbel and you sold to Wente.
- Saini: Well, we sold to Foppiano for what 40 years, 30 years?
- Cuneo: Yeah, we sold to Foppiano for years and years and that was one of the things that you did.
- Saini: We had a lot of uh—lot of our grapes went to San Francisco. And any other, he (Foppiano) took the rest. We had a good relationship.
- Dieden: With Foppiano. Did you have a written contract?
- Cuneo: No. (Laughter)
- Dieden: Or just a handshake?
- Cuneo: We never had a contract with Louie. There was never a piece of paper between us.
- Dieden: How were the prices determined for the grapes?
- Saini: In those days?
- Dieden: Yeah.
- Saini: About in November, they'd say, "Well the grapes are going to be so much, after the wine is made." Am I right!
- Cuneo: Yeah.





- Dieden: After they had made the wine?
- Saini: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Cuneo: In those old days, (there wasn't a contract) you know that only changed with the Gallos about five years ago, four years ago.
- Dieden: You mean as far as contracts are concerned?
- Cuneo: You didn't have a contract, and the price was settled at such and such a time, maybe in the first of October or later.
- Dieden: So you never knew what you were going to be getting. Did you ever sell to Frei Brothers?
- Saini: Yeah.
- Cuneo: Yeah, sold to them a long time.
- Dieden: What were your relationships with them? Because I've heard all kinds of stories.
- Saini: Excellent!
- Dieden: They were?
- Saini: When the old Frei Family was here. It was just, you know, and George Rosasco was there. It was like if you owned your own winery, I'll be truthful with you!
- Cuneo: We sold—we sold grapes on Zandrino's place. We rented it in '53, we sold them to the Freis for years and years. We sold them to the Freis till we gave the ranch up.
- Saini: And then we, we belonged to the Windsor Co-op, and they crushed for Frei, Gallo for what? Forty years—
- Cuneo: Since 1956.
- Saini: 1956. Never any problems. The trouble started, I don't know, you don't want to hear that. You know when the trouble started!
- Dieden: Yeah, any—remember this is for historical purposes.
- Saini: Well, I don't want you to—I don't want you to say, "Saini said, 'Gallo—"



- Cuneo: Well, the thing is this, what Saini says and Cuneo say is true. Then we got two or three years they got in there and this red Zinfandel deal. You'd have a bunch of red Zinfandel, it was a little red and they'd—
- Dieden: Oh, red berries?
- Cuneo: Oh, they docked us from \$400 to \$275 and I mean that it was just a thing that they did for about three years. They lost a lot of, lot of grape.
- Dieden: You're talking about the early '80's then?
- Cuneo: Yes.
- Dieden: Okay, the early 1980's.
- Saini: But prior to that, Gallo was the salvation for this country. Let's not, let's not run him into the ground. Right now, he's accepting these grapes, these are the facts.
- Cuneo: Just the facts.
- Saini: Now, now Carl Peterson will tell them if they go up here. They got by for a couple of years there, and I mean it really, they really cost us money. They downgraded some pretty damn nice grapes. And so of course, we have to, we're gonna tell you we left them. Tom Mauritsen up here (off Lytton Springs) used to haul 'em. Well, between us and Tom Mauritsen, I bet we hauled 'em a thousand ton of grapes. And Walcott, your neighbor, the year he went up there and they made him do this and made him do that, when the grapes had 24 sugar and the winery was still closed and they docked him and paid him for 22. That's when Walcott left.
- Dieden: Yeah, I was with them for three years. They never gave me a bad time, because they were interested in some day buying my property as they surround me on two sides. They were always nice, but I hated what they were doing to other people. So I just decided to hell with it!
- Cuneo: No, no (Gallo) did—they've done a lot, you know.
- Dieden: Sure.
- Cuneo: Because when they were buying all this bulk wine, had it not been for Gallo I don't know what the hell we would have done.



- Saini: Oh, no.
- Dieden: There is no question what they did for the whole California wine industry.
- Saini: Absolutely!
- Dieden: And they brought up the quality levels and they created a market for people to sell their grapes. But hell, they had 25 percent of the business in the United States. I'm fully aware of that. I was interested in, and I think it should be recorded that somebody made some decisions in the early '80's to almost purposely harass growers and they lost a hell of a lot of growers. And now they're trying to change that.
- Cuneo: You know—
- Dieden: And they admit it!
- Saini: Yeah, yeah, yeah—that's—
- Dieden: You talk to Gary Patterson. He'll tell you that they jocked some guys around.
- Cuneo: Like when in 1956, I was the secretary/treasurer for years and years. I still am. It's kind of defunct, but I'm still, I guess, I'm the only official now that's doing anything.
- Dieden: Secretary/treasurer of what?
- Cuneo: Of the Sonoma County Co-op.
- Dieden: Okay.
- Cuneo: In 1956, we—they had a contract and it lasted to three years ago. And we first used to crush down there and then after that we crushed up here and we stored down there. And it was a very—
- Dieden: What, what was down there?
- Cuneo: At the Windsor Co-op.
- Saini: Windsor Co-op.
- Dieden: At the Windsor Co-op, okay.





- Cuneo: And it was a very good relationship. God I know Julio (Gallo) like I know Si. But like you say and when you go there and people would look at a load of grapes just like you would a load of—
- Dieden: Yeah.
- Cuneo: So that's what happened there. The company, this is the reason why we're there. Mostly we haul to Sebastiani. All the red grapes and all the Chardonnay goes to Sebastiani. We think we got a pretty good relationship there.
- Saini: But it's 52 miles down the road.
- Cuneo: Which is not as easy as going up to Freis—and we feel that, they're doing a good job. Their (Sebastiani's) field man was here yesterday and he said that the 1987 Zinfandel got the Gold Medal at the Orange.
- Dieden: Orange County?
- Cuneo: Orange County Fair and another one, got two Gold Medals. And that '87 Zinfandel is, I would say, 67 percent our grapes.
- Dieden: That's good. I just found out that when Windsor (Vineyards) comes out with the '87 Zin, 60 percent of it will be from my vineyard and the other blend will be their own vines. And I, I switched to Beringer last year because I like the way they treated people the year prior when the prices went up.
- Saini: Yeah, yeah.
- Dieden: You had a contract but—
- Cuneo: You can't have a better guy than George Buonaccorsi.
- Dieden: Oh, I like him. George is great.
- Cuneo: Going back, when we sold to Seghesio, it was a big help. You know, good people to do business with. Of course, they had to quit when they couldn't sell the bulk wine. Excellent people to do business with.
- Dieden: And then again, when was this?
- Cuneo: This was back in the '70's.
- Saini: The '70's and prior. It was all, we think it going to be this, and we'll see and then we'll see what Gallo—what we can sell





the wine for? There was never (a contract). The first time I can remember, Gene, of us selling grapes with a pre-price was when Paul LeBaron stopped by here and said this fellow that's got this winery down there wants to buy some Zinfandel. "Will you sell him some?" And it was \$135 a ton and the deal was made in July, Rod Strong when he started down in Windsor.

Dieden: Windsor?

Saini: Yeah, not Windsor where he is now—down across from the Sonoma County Co-op.

Cuneo: Past the Sonoma County Co-op on Windsor Road.

Saini: Where when they sent me down there with a truck and I said, "Somebody is playing an awful joke on me." I can't even turn the truck around here!

Dieden: (Laughter)

Cuneo: But that was the first time that I can remember that we sold grapes with a price.

Dieden: Well, I guess the big, big trend in contracts really came up about '80, '82.

Saini: In the '80's they started.

Cuneo: In the '80's, yeah. See like, then I thought we sold them all the Green Hungarian to Windsor Vineyards for a couple of years. Then from there we went to Souverain, Pillsbury came in and built Souverain and we sold Zinfandel.

Saini: The Green Hungarian went to Weibel.

Cuneo: And then when they didn't take it anymore, then it went to Souverain.

Saini: Yeah, right. You want to go back to something, go back to 1932 when we sold grapes for eight dollars.

Dieden: This is exactly the type of information I want.

Saini: You know, you know what occurred in the '70's.

Dieden: Yeah.



- Cuneo: 1932, we sold grapes for eight dollars (a ton) and we had this big block of grapes and couldn't sell them to anybody. So, I don't know if you knew of him. Then it was Cerri, he owned the building where Purity Chemical is now.
- Saini: On North Street (Healdsburg).
- Cuneo: So he was shipping grapes on consignment back East. So, my father made the deal. So when they picked these grapes in 25 pound lugs. They made the boxes right on there. Wasn't it that? What was his name?
- Mrs. Cuneo Oh, Joe Brigandi.
- Cuneo: So we picked these grapes and took them all, and Irma and I weren't married yet and she would kind of arrange them on top and fix them and they lidded them, and we did all of this to haul them to town, loaded them in the car.
- Dieden: In the car?
- Cuneo: Yeah, cleated them.
- Saini: Railroad car.
- Irma Cuneo: Railroad car.
- Dieden: Oh, okay.
- Cuneo: They were shipped in a refrigerator car and we cleated them all in. We put the slabs in there, did it all. Two months after they shipped the car, Cerri goes up and he wanted my dad and his dad (Saini) to pay the freight, but they didn't. Never got a nickel out of them (Cerri). Never got one red cent.
- Dieden: At eight dollars?
- Saini: No!
- Dieden: You had to pay for the boxes too?
- Saini: No, they paid, they furnished the boxes.
- Cuneo: They supplied the boxes.
- Saini: They furnished the boxes, but we hauled them to town and loaded them and —
- Cuneo: Put them in that boxcar.



- Cuneo: And finished the car, blocked and did everything. They showed us how we had to do it.
- Saini: Well, I remember in Alexander Valley the Petit(e) Sirah putting the lids on ...
- Cuneo: Yeah.
- Saini: On the box.
- Cuneo: What was that guy's name? It was an Italian guy, I remember. We put—picked Petit(e) Sirah for him.
- Saini: For the guy, he'd come up from Calistoga with this big three-axle truck, which was unheard of in those days. Get there at 10:30 at night, load them boxes and then that was about \$25.00 per ton.
- Cuneo: Oh, yeah.
- Saini: Weighed each box to make sure it was, what, 32 pounds. Yeah, they had to be so, so.
- Cuneo: And you go back to that talking of Foppiano's, I always remember the 1935, we sold them grapes for twelve dollars (a ton) and he sold the wine for twelve cents (a gallon). (Laughter) So you can imagine how much money he and us made.
- Dieden: (Laughter) How could you get by?
- Saini: Well—
- Dieden: Seriously.
- Irma Cuneo: Seriously right.
- Saini: You didn't break any records going to the bank because labor was two bits. You know, I found a tag the other day where Fred Bouldon in town, who was the blacksmith in the '40's, the late '30's—'40's. We're still argue as of now that the truck we bought in 1946, and uh, to put the bed on this truck and it was a nice bed too. It was \$214.00. And the tag showed where it cost 60 cents to put a handle on, 50 cents to do this, sharpened a plowshare for \$1.35. It was tough. It was tough. It was tough. You know that guy that lost to Carl. I always remember Carl always says this you know, Petersen, when we were talking about \$8.00. He said, that he hauled 20 ton





of grapes over to Geyserville freight yard, at the dock there and loaded them in a car for 100 bucks. Five bucks a ton.

Irma Cuneo: What about the grapes Vercelli bought?

Cuneo: Oh, that was, his dad (Saini's) sold grapes for 13 dollars and then Vercelli paid him 12. (Laughter) but it was also in prunes you know, you want to go back to the prunes?

Saini: Yeah.

Cuneo: The prunes had a cent and a quarter base.

Saini: So you were in the same ballpark.

Dieden: It's hard to understand how you could really exist.

Saini: I don't know. Hell, I can remember eating just as much in those days. (Laughter)

Dieden: Well, you probably grew most of your food.

Saini: Yeah, yeah.

Cuneo: Cows, pigs, chickens.

Irma Cuneo: Big garden, vegetable garden.

Cuneo: I remember when we bought that Cletrac diesel. The diesel was 6 1/4 cents a gallon.

Dieden: (Laughter)

Cuneo: I remember that very well. We bought that tractor in 1937, you know. Things worked. But people had the mortgages worked just as hard. You can leave it on or turn it off—

Dieden: No, no, this is to develop the history of the valley.

Cuneo: —there was a little bootlegging that was going on, too.

Saini: The bootlegging helped a little bit too.

Wouldn't you say Gene, that the grapes at that time were kind of a secondary crop? And planted on at that time, what we thought was the worst land.

Irma Cuneo: Yes.





Cuneo: Well, sure.

Dieden: The best land was mostly for the prunes.

Saini: Oh, yeah.

Cuneo: Like he says, even here above the highway (Dry Creek Road). You start here at the road, and the further back you go, the ground gets to be red and beautiful grape land. But it gets into the red dirt in the middle of it. And all of the piece close to the road was all Imperial prunes. The flat was all prunes.

Another thing too, in those days maybe it was the land, it was the way we farmed and everything. You took a sulfur machine on your back and that's all you had—couple doses of sulfur. You didn't have one guy spraying all night. It's something. His son, my God, sometimes starting at dark with the sprayer and he works all night. We didn't do those things.

Saini: You know, this was all vineyard. The piece that we're playing with up here on the bench that we're going to replant. Well, that was vineyard. That hillside was vineyard.

Cuneo: That was vineyard. The other hill over there in Lencioni's was all vineyard, Chiquita Road —

Irma Cuneo: That was straight up the hill.

Saini: That was all vineyard.

Irma Cuneo: All vineyard.

Dieden: Now, what years are you talking about here?

Cuneo: We abandoned that hill in 1960. But now we're gonna go back and plant it. All of these hills around here were owned by, during the Depression, Bank of America owned them all. The Simi place...(Ed) Norton's over here where the Airport is (Lytton Springs Road). The Bank of America owned them all. The entity that owned it was California Lands, a subsidiary of Bank of America. And these guys, and everyone of those guys lost it. There wasn't a piece of that land that wasn't owned by the bank.

Dieden: They just—lost it to the bank?

Saini: Sure, there wasn't any money.

Dieden: What did the bank do? Just have leases with them?



Saini: No, they (growers) owed them money.

Dieden: Yeah, but who farmed them?

Saini: Well—

Dieden: Did the bank lease back to them so they could farm?

Saini: John Gondola.

Cuneo: Yeah, yeah.

Saini: I think he worked for the bank.

Cuneo: He farmed about 30 places didn't he?

Saini: Yeah.

Irma Cuneo: Yeah.

Saini: See, he was farming it all, well, he was working all of the California Lands places.

Dieden: What kind of equipment would he use then?

Saini: He had an old Cletrac with a disc and they went down the rows and scratched it. (Laughter)

Cuneo: And all those hills that the bank had mortgages on, then after awhile they got down as Si says, "Got dirt." A ton to the acre, there wasn't any profit. Many of the people lost it. The Lencioni property up here, the guy had built a beautiful home, then he died in 1920 and he had a winery and of course, then there was Prohibition so that went to pot. And the bank took it all over.

Dieden: Okay.

Cuneo: Then the son came back, 25 years later, 20 years.

Irma Cuneo: Fred, after the War (World War II).

Cuneo: After—he came back and bought the place.

Saini: And bought it for a song from the bank.

Dieden: From the bank, probably glad for him to have it.



Saini: Glad for him to have it.

Cuneo: Fred and Ed paid 15 thousand for that whole thing.

Dieden: How many acres?

Cuneo: It was a hundred and—Jesus (Laughter)—what a steal. The site of the winery, they tore it down and they built a nice little home that, what's his name has?

Irma Cuneo: Darby.

Saini: Darby. And then Fred and Ed Norton split it. Ed took the piece toward Lytton (Springs) Road and Fred took the rest. That home, that's on there now, attorney (Monte) Hanson has got it now. I bet the thing is worth 300,000 bucks. It was a beautiful home in its day.

Dieden: Yeah, I just say that piece pretty close to me, 21 acres of Zin up on the bench. The price I heard was 1 million and a half.

Irma Cuneo: Hmmm.

Saini: Half of the Steindorf Hill (opposite Cuneo property on the bench) what did it go for? \$41,000 an acre?

Cuneo: Yeah, something like that.

Saini: Yeah, they said it was in escrow for that. I think it is 21 or 22 acres up on the hill. I don't think there is any home or anything on it.

Cuneo: The old Walker place sold, didn't it?

Irma Cuneo: Yes, they just sold it.

Saini: For what, a million? Eight hundred and ninety thousand.

Irma Cuneo: What was it Gene? A million and some?

Dieden: How many acres in that?

Irma Cuneo: Twenty.

Saini: Twenty.

Cuneo: Well, I'd say, uh, 25 or —

End of side one





- Cuneo: Nicest apple orchard you ever seen.
- Irma Cuneo: Oh, gorgeous.
- Cuneo: Beautiful.
- Dieden: What kind of apples? Gravenstein?
- Cuneo: Gravenstein.
- Irma Cuneo: Best orchard in the county.
- Saini: The trees were that big.
- Dieden: Was there a market for them? Because those things don't keep, I had about eight trees and I took them out.
- Cuneo: The Gravenstein apples business just, it was a farce around here. They'd—everybody tried to be the first one on the market and they were green and they wouldn't keep. They're good cooking apples, they're not an eating apple. They're eating apples if eaten right after being picked.
- Dieden: If you took them right off the tree, they're the greatest eating apple, in my opinion.
- Irma Cuneo: They're the best apples, though.
- Cuneo: This was the Geyserville Growers. And her father, Miller Fruit, Healdsburg Packing, I mean in the summertime, right about this time, there would be trucks starting the packing season.
- Irma Cuneo: That's where Evans (Ceramics) is now. Used to be Miller (Grant Street by the railroad tracks, Healdsburg).
- Dieden: So the big turnaround really began, what would you say, about early '70's?
- Saini: Yeah, well, late '70's.
- Dieden: When the grape boom hit, about the early '70's.
- Cuneo: The turnaround started in about '63. That's when you, the first grapes were planted.
- Dieden: When did the people start coming?





- Cuneo: That's when the prune peopled started to make the switch, some of the prune people in '63, some of them.
- Saini: But there wasn't too many.
- Cuneo: No, it wasn't.
- Saini: See, when we dug out the first piece, Martin's in '74, we were about one of the first ones.
- Cuneo: Oh, yeah.
- Saini: There were some below, above the road, no. The guys had cleaned them all out, see. There were quite a few prunes in the bench here.
- Irma Cuneo: I was just thinking when our son went to Santa Clara and Diane was at Saint Johns, that year we made \$5,000 for the whole year. We had to eat, we had to support him, course, he worked most of the time. It was slim pickens but we made it, well. (Mr. Cuneo leaves for an appointment)
- Dieden: What made you decided to go ahead and pull your prunes and make the plunge into more grapes?
- Cuneo: Well, it was really the economics. You know we had the finest piece of land in the thing down here, and we were getting a ton and a half of prunes to the acres. And it finally came down to the point that he and I decided look, we just gotta move. We're not going to make it.
- Saini: It wasn't one thing, around here you can't grow a prune tree anymore, that was—besides the economics. You replant a tree. It gets up about four years old, it gets sour sap and dies. There's a 24 foot area there that you get nothing for six or seven years—hell. Our orchard we really got it up and everything, got around four tons to the acre. That year we had 98 tons.
- Dieden: What year was that Gene?
- Saini: Oh, I can't remember.
- Cuneo: Goes back to the early '60's.
- Saini: The next year was the big crop. Then for some reason why, there was the mechanical shaker or what, in three years that orchard just went to hell.



- Cuneo: Let's say it was an old orchard, but then for some reason or other, like what Si says is true. But then we got to the point that you would get out the most beautiful tree that you want to, four or five years old and by God you go down there in May and here's a leaf turning and it would die. You see it over in that Sacramento Valley, and they don't play around. An orchard gets 20 years old, they go and they wipe it out and they fumigate, whatever they do, and start all over again. Well economically, especially with the prices of the grape doing better and the cost of dehydrating prunes got to be horrible. the Sunsweet were pretty good but they were still high. So, we made the jump, see and we did two blocks, but then we did 16 acres in one crack. And that kind of puts a hump in your whole checkbook. (Chuckles)
- Saini: And then we went over in Alexander Valley and the whole crud over there, did it in one shot. Pulled a 90 year old vineyard down.
- Dieden: Pulled out a 90 year old and converted it?
- Saini: Replanted 26 acres.
- Dieden: Replanted?
- Cuneo: Replanted it, yes. You know, actually, I don't know how to put this, grapes have to fly around here because that's the only crop we can really, that's the only crop we can really raise. Unless you're Clint Hocking and have a block of pears like he does and knows how to farm them like he does. That's about the only crop. So grapes better fly around here!
- Dieden: Do you see any reason why they, why they shouldn't? Of course, now you know you're getting into the world picture of wine and—
- Cuneo: I wouldn't know, no, I wouldn't even dwell on that.
- Dieden: The amount of good land for grapes from what I've come to learn to understand is finite, it's limited.
- Cuneo: Well that's our ace in the hole.
- Dieden: And the climate that you have in Dry Creek, Alexander Valley and the Napa Valley are just limited spots on earth.
- Cuneo: Yeah.





- Dieden: So it is just a natural for grapes.
- Cuneo: That's our ace in the hole. And we figure that because we have the kind of quality. No matter what they try to do in the rest of this state, they can't raise the types we do. They can't make the Zinfandel we make or even the Cabernet we make. They do a fair job on Chardonnay and even then I don't think it's the best in the world.
- Dieden: They just don't have the climate. Everything goes to sugar in the Central Valley. Here you get the cool evenings and you can retain the sugar acid balance.
- Saini: Well like Pete Seghesio says, that six months after they put it in the bottle, you taste the dirt. (Laughter)
- Dieden: Well, what do you think needs to be done to protect this valley so that what is here isn't lost?
- Cuneo: Keep the environmentalists out.
- Saini: People are our biggest enemy.
- Dieden: Yeah, and the possibility of changing of zoning and ...
- Saini: Yeah.
- Dieden: And houses coming in.
- Saini: Right, absolutely.
- Cuneo: See, right now both Alexander Valley and Dry Creek are well zoned, but it only takes three votes of that Board of Supervisors to throw it out.
- Saini: Yeah that's our biggest problem. Economics and this and that, that's one thing. If you get run out, well, I don't know, it's getting harder to farm. We don't have to go into that, but you know that.
- And one thing too, if it stays good, then people don't think about selling, you know, that's another thing. You know every place you go, people are just pouring in. We came here for one reason. The other people want to come here for the same reason.
- Cuneo: And you see in every place that there's a, Si says there's a house, a piece of property that's a parcel and they can build a house. Now, see, there's a new house, one down here in the





creek that belongs to a doctor. Then the 14 acres over here, that joins us, the guys came in, they bought it and they had another piece of property they sold it and bought this and they built a house. Doug Nalle over on Harold Henderlong's, they built a house up there. See, every parcel that there is, you can't stop 'em. The parcel is there so you can build, see.

Dieden: You're talking about an acre that just happens to have a house on it so you can take down an old house and put up a new...

Cuneo: Well, there's none, this 14 acres had no house see, so they built on and the one down here on the river, there was no house on it, so they built one. And everybody, everyday, you know somebody comes over and says "Gee, how about (selling)", you get a letter, well, the guy who sold the Walker place, I got a letter here, "I sold this place at 3310, if you want to sell your place, let me know." And all this.

Dieden: I get that junk in the mail everyday.

Cuneo: That and the other thing, that I think of course is not only in our area, it's all over the state. This environmental thing, like now if they pass this *Big Green* and say you can't do this and you can't do that. There's certain things that we have to contend with in the vineyard, like this mite is one. They're making it tougher and tougher to protect for this mite and Zinfandel is one it likes to thrive one—the environmental problems!

Dieden: What chemicals you can use and...

Cuneo: Yeah, like now if this *Big Green* passes, they got a list of things by 1996 that you're not going to let you use them (pesticides) anymore, see. Of course, I think that they would go to court, it's going to be a big battle.

Dieden: That's an interesting point. I'm glad you said that.

You say essentially you farm with your son and then you have crews. Do you have some basic crew that you keep and have housing for?

Saini: Yeah, yeah. All the people on our place, that work on the ranch are housed on the ranches.

Dieden: Okay, what about harvesting, to get additional help?



- Saini: Last year out of the 35 people, 35 or how many did we have? 35 or 38. There were three people living off the ranch.
- Dieden: So you have 32 that are here the year around?
- Saini: The house over here, this fellow comes back, he says how many do you want and he came back with twelve. The place is big enough. He had twelve. We—the people that we have houses, we tell them you'll have to help us during grape harvest and they'll help us and they'll get somebody to live with them. And we have two houses that are just for single men. So, it's not the best housing, but it's housing.
- Dieden: By their standards it's adequate.
- Saini: Yeah. You know, showers, inside toilets, double walls. We make sure that the septic tank system works. We were, with all that stuff, we were real good. There were only three people living off the ranch out of that crew that lived in town. Because there was one guy worked for the county and he left at 4:30, he had his own home. So there were only three guys that lived off the ranch.
- Dieden: Have you given any thought to mechanical harvesting?
- Saini: We did some.
- Dieden: You think that's the way of the future? Because the help is, for all kinds of reasons is not going to be there.
- Saini: All kinds of reasons. We picked the Cabernet. We picked half of the Cabernet in Alexander Valley by hand. We picked the other half by machine. More to try to see, so we know what we were doing. No comparison. No comparison at all.
- Dieden: Yeah, Tim (Murphy) says these things—I heard it was a lot cheaper, faster, you can do it at night, you can do it 24 hours a day.
- Saini: You can see right through the row. The Cabernet, the berries were on the ground, they're a tough grape to pick.
- Cuneo: They're a hard grape to pick.
- Saini: Gene and I and the other kid and the harvester crew, hell, we started at 9:15, at 3:15 the block was done. It's, it was all up 42 inches high and it's all on steel stakes. It was ideal—but I knew it did a good job, but I never believed that—



- Dieden: It would be that good.
- Saini: Yes.
- Cuneo: I loved it. We had one truck load that was hand picked. The big one had 24 ton on it. The hand picked load, now you wouldn't believe this, went 23.9 and the machine picked load 24.2. What second crop there was, was all picked and yet the sugar for the two loads was all right together.
- Dieden: So the quality is maintained. No question. What was the attitude? I understand Gallo's changed their thinking. But for a long time they said they wouldn't buy any grapes that were machine picked. But as I see it, the trend of the future is going to be mechanical.
- Saini: Well, if he sticks to that theory, him and his brother will be up there running the field crew.
- Dieden: Yeah. Oh, they've changed. (Laughter) Because they were experimenting with a harvester right next to me.
- Saini: You're not going to plant that many grapes and sit there and say you're not going to pick them with a machine. Because first of all, he's filled the area with Cabernet and you know, I don't care what they pay, those guys don't want to pick Cabernet.
- Dieden: They don't want to pick 'em. They want cordoned Zinfandel.
- Saini: Yeah, (laughter) they want to go down here on the flat and put down the tub and not touch the tub and not touch the grape and go like this and—and fill the tub without moving it too far.
- Dieden: Just move it a little.
- Saini: Yeah. You know 179 tubs in one day, you know, well, you get on Cabernet and you might do that in four days.
- Cuneo: You see, another thing too, if you want to talk about Gallo. He hasn't got one space for any one person to live. He got, what few houses he had in these placed that he bought, he got rid of 'em. So he'll have to change his thinking.
- Saini: In fact, he will.
- Cuneo: I really feel that. Now Korbel so far, they frown—they haven't taken any (mechanical harvesting.) They haven't, I





don't think they've taken any. I'm not sure. But that's one thing about it, you get down in this Chenin Blanc and this Colombard a guy will go crazy, it's so thick with grapes.

Dieden: Well, the choice has got to be made for them. Gallo, I mean. Korbel won't be able to dictate that. "Well, we won't have any grapes to bring into you because no one is going to pick 'em."

Cuneo: I know that. When Vino Farms was there, Jim Ledbetter, he asked them. And if you go down there and pick this Chenin Blanc and the Colombard with those machines what they will charge? You pick it for \$20.00 a ton.

Dieden: Isn't that unreal.

Thank you gentlemen. I know you're busy. Thank you.

End of Taped Interview.

Final Typing by Gail Ryan, Healdsburg





## INTRODUCTION TO RUTH WATSON ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Ruth Somes Watson lives in the family home on West Dry Creek, her ancestors history chronicles Dry Creek Valley's history. Her great-grandparents on her mother's side, and grandparents on her father's side came to the valley early in the 1850's. In fact, she remembers her mother and father "discussing" which was the more difficult way to come to California, for surely their ancestors' experiences were the worse — around the Horn or across the plains, boat or Indians! Her ancestors had a brief period of working in the gold fields in the Sierras, then settled in Dry Creek, Sonoma County.

During the interview Mrs. Watson relates family history as well as other families that were early settlers in the area. It is evident that her family's love of the land has been passed to her and her daughters.

The interviewer is Louise Davis. Her father, Obed Bosworth and mother, Marie (Glaser) Bosworth Beers were both born to early settlers of Sonoma County. Her father worked with his father in their mercantile store in Geyserville for decades, with Marie joining Obed after their marriage (son Harry is now the proprietor of Bosworth and Son), here they not only sold goods but were collectors of history. After Obed's death in 1981 at 86, Louise realized she had missed recording his vast storage of information for future generations, this sparked her intense interest in Geyserville history. This interview is one of many undertaken to record and save individual knowledge for the future.



**Ruth Somes Watson**

Interviewed by Louise Bosworth Davis  
also present Mrs. Watson's daughter, Joanne Rochester  
9101 West Dry Creek, Healdsburg, CA  
October 30, 1992

Transcription by Gail Ryan 1993

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- Louise Davis: Who was the first person that came to the Dry Creek area—of your family? It was probably the Phillips?
- Ruth Watson: It was the Phillips, as far as, I know.
- Davis: Do you have any idea what year? They bought a portion of the land grant from Pina, it was probably about 1850's, maybe even the late '40s.
- Watson: Well, when the second child was born—that is my grandfather, Gabriel Duvall Phillips, and he was born March 10, 1847.
- Davis: Were they here then?
- Watson: No, they were in Kentucky or maybe Missouri—his mother died the day he was born.
- Davis: That's Amelia, she died in childbirth.
- Watson: Amelia Phillips. The two boys were raised by their grandmother Kennedy.
- Davis: Then afterward he would have married Mary McCloud.
- Watson: They say that she was Mary Terry, but it's really Mary Terry McCloud.
- Davis: Somewhere I saw Terry also. But it's the same person and she was the mother of Major Phillip's father and of this Fred, whose son was Harold, whose daughter was Pat Schmidt. Here is an Edward—you said there was an Ed—
- Watson: Yes, he lived in the adobe for years and years. When I was a kid—
- Davis: That would have been Major's uncle?



- Watson: That's right.
- Davis: There was a Walton, Edward, Hugh, Clarence and Fred.
- Watson: See he had two families. When he married Mary Terry—then he had the whole family of boys.
- Davis: He had all boys anyway, didn't he? He had George and Gabriel.
- Watson: From the first wife.
- Davis: Then he has five boys from the second wife... he had seven boys.
- Your grandfather then was Gabriel Duvall Phillips, and he was not born here in Sonoma County?
- Watson: No. In Missouri, maybe, it [the family history] says he married Amelia Kennedy in Missouri. We are starting out with Duvall Drake Phillips. He married Amelia Kennedy in Missouri and the first born was George Washington Phillips. Amelia Phillips died the day he [George Washington Phillips] was born.
- Davis: You don't know actually when they came then?
- Watson: It seems we were more interested in when they died than in when they came. [chuckles]
- Davis: Your grandfather came to the Dry Creek area probably when he was a little boy—it was your great-grandfather, D. D. Phillips, who first came to Dry Creek? And he came from Missouri?
- Watson: He was born in Kentucky but lived in Missouri.
- Davis: I don't suppose you have any idea why they came?
- Watson: After *that gold* I guess. It [family history] says he tried gold mining at Mud Springs near Jackson. And that is where he met Mary Terry.
- Davis: His second wife.
- Watson: Yes, and they were married in 1855.
- Davis: Does it say there when he came to Jackson?





- Watson: No. [Reading] After the death of his wife, Duvall Drake Phillips joined the Kit Carson Brigade and came West, eventually he tried gold mining in the Sierra Nevada at Mud Springs near Jackson—
- Davis: But it doesn't say when he came?
- Watson: —where he met Mary Terry and they were married in 1855.
- Joanne Rochester  
[daughter]: I bet he took off as soon as he lost his wife.
- Davis: Except gold wasn't discovered until '48—but that could have been.
- Watson: That's all right, because she died in 1847, then he heard about the gold discovery, and he decided to come West. That sounds logical.
- Davis: At Mud Springs, near Jackson. Now when did they come to Dry Creek?
- Watson: After he married Mary Terry in 1855, later he moved to Dry Creek Valley and purchased the Tzabaco Rancho from German Pina in 1856.
- Davis: In 1856, they moved to Dry Creek.
- Watson: Where they remodeled the old adobe home, and he reared his second family there, and he died in 1904. It even tells where he's buried, the plot, the number and everything.
- Davis: So they settled just south of Canyon Road.
- Watson: They purchased the Tzabaco Rancho from German Pina in 1856.
- Davis: Do you have any idea how many acres?
- Watson: It doesn't say.
- Davis: It was a lot. And the house would have been the old Pena Adobe.
- Watson: I think there was something down along the line here about the acreage. [Looks through papers] Okay, Gabriel, I can tell how much property Gabriel had. Gabriel and his family moved to West Dry Creek Road, (that's where we are right



now) where he purchased about 125 acres of property, partly fruit farming land. My aunt was born up in Grass Valley, where [Harry] Merlo owns now, up this way, way up. That's where they settled when they first came. I don't know how long they stayed there. [Annie] She was born there, the only one, the rest of them were born on another house on this ranch.

Davis: That [acreage] wasn't part of this?

Watson: No, this is what they bought on Pena Creek, the south side of Pena Creek. I think they homesteaded [the Grass Valley] up there, I don't know how many acres it was.

Davis: Then they moved down here. How many acres?

Watson: 125. He died at the age of 43.

Davis: Is that this property?

Watson: Yes.

Davis: He was awfully young to die.

Watson: Yes, he left a widow and four small children. He died—they didn't know what they died of in those days, they just said anything I think—the cause of death was called, at that time, inflammation of the bowels. It was probably appendicitis.

Davis: What were the names of his children? One of them, of course, would have been your—

Watson: Amelia [Annie].

Davis: Amelia that became [the mother of Walter] . One would, of course, have been Mollie.

Watson: My mother was Mollie Somes.

Rochester: I thought she was called Mary?

Watson: Well, her real name was Mary Ellen, but we knew her as Mollie.

Davis: She married Somes. What were the other two?



- Watson: Maude—she married George Hendricks and they had a son, and she died soon after he was born. She died of blood poisoning.
- Davis: They had one boy. Leon.
- Watson: That's right, but I don't know what year. He would have been born the same year as my brother was. Because they were both going to have babies at practically the same time. She got the blood poisoning and they always claimed that it was carried on to my mother from the same doctor. Who knows? And then my mother had my brother and his name was Phillip. That was right within a couple of weeks.
- Davis: I talked to Leon's wife too.
- Watson: She likes to talk, well, I mean that she doesn't mind talking, not like me, I don't like talking.
- Davis: What's her name? It's like a man's name—Willie?
- Watson: That's right, they call her Willie.
- Davis: [Laughs] I really should remind myself. Shows my memory. Okay who was the fourth one—Amelia, Mollie and Maude—
- Watson: Then there was George Phillips, he was the youngest, he was a little guy.
- Rochester: Brother George.
- Watson: They always called him *Brother* George.
- Davis: Three girls and then a boy.
- Watson: I don't know what his age is, or even when he was born.
- Davis: Do we have them in the right order? Was Amelia the oldest?
- Watson: You're right. Then my mother and Maude and the boy. That's all here in this [family history].
- Davis: I suppose it is kind of silly to ask you who the Phillips' neighbors were. You wouldn't know anyway. They probably didn't have any to start with as it was all Rancho land.
- Watson: Well, I've heard them speak of people, but I don't know. The Bells.





- Davis: I'm talking D. D., your great-grandfather, way back.
- Watson: I wouldn't have any idea.
- Davis: Then, as far as your grandparents go, you are saying that you don't really know who their neighbors were here either—
- Watson: I can't go much further back than what I know when I was a child.
- Davis: Did you know your grandfather?
- Watson: I never had one—on either side.
- Davis: That's right, he was only 43 when he passed away.
- Watson: Even my father's parents—they had all died. You see I came at the tail end and missed out on [having] a grandmother and grandfather.
- Davis: And grandmother is the same thing, you don't remember your grandmother?
- Watson: No, she died before my mother was married.
- Davis: What you know is what you have written there.
- Watson: It's all here, it's condensed. [Laughs]
- Davis: Do you have any idea, I don't know if it say there, who your grand-parents bought this property from?
- Watson: Well, there's quite a discussion on that. And I did ask Duvall, and he's not sure about it either, but it seems as though (don't go on about it too much), nobody can say for sure—there does seem to be a Kinsey Bell—who would be Duvall's uncle—anyway, he lived down here where the Maddens live now.
- Davis: I saw the Madden Ranch as I came up.
- Watson: And he owned an awful lot of property through here, and he thought that it might have originated from him, they bought from him 125 acres. So that's how they got started here, and we've been here ever since. Seven generations, you know, have lived on this ranch, that's quite a few!
- Davis: Starting with your grandfather—



- Watson: My great-grandmother—
- Davis: Your great-grandmother.
- Watson: She came with my grandmother from Missouri in a covered wagon. My great-grandmother was Julia Evans, my grandmother's mother. My grandmother was Lottie Capp.
- Davis: Right, and it was her mother? *Her* mother was Julia Evans. I do have it here, I changed it a bit. I have Gabriel Phillips married Lottie Capp and it was her mother that came over. It's a whole different family then, it's not the Phillips family.
- Watson: Julia Evans, Lottie's mother, she was born in 1824 and died in 1900. She out-lived her daughter. My great-grandmother out-lived her daughter. After the death of their mother, the four children were left alone except for their grandmother, Julia Evans, and they all continued to live at the Pena Creek ranch home with the help of G. D. Phillips, one of his sons of his second marriage, Fredrick Phillips, Patty Schmidt's grandfather.
- Davis: Okay, Lottie Capp was the wife of—you call him Gabriel?
- Watson: [Laughs] I didn't call him anything.
- Davis: I didn't want to call him Duvall, because I would get him mixed up with Duvall [Bell].
- So Lottie Capp's parents came here—
- Watson: Not the parents, I've only heard of the mother. He must have died before they moved out here.
- Gabriel homesteaded a 160 acres of land in Grass Valley. That's quite a bit.
- Davis: This is the Grass Valley out on Skaggs Springs Road?
- Watson: Right, [Harry] Merlo owns it now. The old Reilly Ranch, you probably remember that?
- Davis: I know of that, yes.
- Watson: You mention Grass Valley and everyone thinks of it as over in the Gold County—



- Davis: Over in Nevada County.
- Now what about on the Somes side? How far back do you go?
- Watson: I can't go back a whole lot on that one, because you have to have someone interested in picking this up. You have Duvall on the [Phillips side]. Ardis [Thornberry, daughter] has done more on the Somes side. Because she went back to Maine where they came from, she's visited the graves and everything.
- Davis: Do you know whether it was your grandparents that came on that side or do you go back to your great-grandparents?
- Watson: They came from Maine around the Horn. I don't know what the date is on that one, unless it's in here somewhere, it should be.
- Davis: Where did they come from?
- Watson: From Maine—around the Horn. I used to get such a kick out of listening to them tell about that, because my mother would say her folks had the worse trip over cause they had to fight Indians. And my father said there couldn't be anything worse than going around the Horn. I got that book out one day and I think he was right. It's a long ways. Clear down South America and way up the coast. I think it was a six months' trip, but even six months doesn't sound like you could make it in those days. It's a long ways.
- Davis: And very cold too, I would think. You are almost to Antarctica.
- Then you had a third alternative that my great-grandfather took—going across the Isthmus [of Panama].
- Watson: When was that built? That was later—
- Davis: You had to come across on mules, come across the Canal on mules.
- Watson: I see.
- Davis: But that was dangerous too. Because there was a real risk of jungle type diseases like Malaria.
- Watson: It's not very far through there.





- Davis: No, it's not far through, but it's all thick with jungle.
- Watson: When you look at it [on a map] it's not very far.
- Davis: No, but it's thick with jungle. It was really easy to catch diseases and die.
- Do you have any idea why he [Somes] came?
- Watson: Probably for the same reason—the gold. Wasn't that the object of getting out here, because they had heard it was a rich country?
- Davis: Well, it was for more than that to start with. If you study the Donner Party, it was on [television] the other night, they came in 1846. Two years, a year a half, before gold was discovered. It was still the *Land of Opportunity*. There was already a very big Western Movement, before gold was discovered, they had been told of this wonderful place. It could have been for that reason.
- Who are we talking about though with Somes, your grandfather or your great-grandfather?
- Watson: Grandfather, I don't know a thing about my great-grandfather. Just my grandfather and grandmother.
- Davis: So the grandfather (you gave me your family history here) James Somes, Jr. He's the man that came out here.
- [Look through papers and book on different families, Bells, Phillips—]
- Watson: Yes, and her name was Louisa.
- Davis: Louisa Wright, was his wife and those were the first ones that came out to California?
- Watson: Yes, I think that he came out and went back and got her. I need to see here (looks through papers)—
- My father's parents were James and Louisa M. Wright Somes, Louisa M. Wright they were natives of the state of Maine, having been born on Mount Desert Island. They were married in the Pine Tree State, and several years later in 1848 the father came to California making the long journey around Cape Horn. Having decided to make his permanent home here, he returned to the East and brought his wife and two children to the Pacific Coast making the





trip by way of the Isthmus of Panama then. So he did the same thing—

Davis: The same thing my great-grandfather did.

Watson: For several years, Mr. Somes was engaged in mining in Placer County and in the early '50s came to Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County. He bought a tract of land to the improvement and cultivation of which he devoted his energy eventually transforming it into a good and profitable farm on which he and his wife spent their remaining days.

There were five children born to the family. But I don't know about that fifth one, because I have never heard anyone speak about it. It might have died when it was born.

Davis: Yes, there are just four here listed.

That's what Harry [Bosworth] was telling me. See, my grandfather, Calvin Bosworth, was also from Maine. And according to Harry, that's where they met each other, they were from the same town in Maine, or at least the same vicinity. They both came out at approximately the same time, and my great-grandfather also mined in Placer County. He mined somewhere near a town of La Porte.

Watson: Yes, I know that area.

Davis: That's Plumas County, La Porte. Whether that was Plumas County then—

Watson: That's not too far from Quincy.

Davis: That's right. Calvin Bosworth mined for a while, according to Harry, the Somes and the Bosworths, who knew each other in Maine, mined together in—Harry just assumed it was the La Porte area, because that was the only area we know our great-grandfather mined in. So that would fit. that they were from Maine.

[Shows Louise a photo Ardis picked up in Somesville, Mount Desert Island, Maine.]  
(Review of previous info)

Davis: You don't have any idea of who's property he bought do you?

Watson: No, I don't, I'll tell you where they lived. It's almost where your uncle lives now, Albert and Helen [Glaser], only where Paul Bernier lives. That's where they were when I was—I



don't know if that was the first place they had but—there for many, many years. On the hill too, just where they are. Then the brother, Bert Some, built a home down where Teldeschi's now live. They've torn down the old house. They built that house, my uncle that lived in Chico, Charles, built a home next to it. Mrs. Mary Zandrino now lives there, I think it's the same house. She's an old lady.

Davis: So, they both lived in the Dry Creek Valley.

Watson: When Charles got married he moved to Chico, their whole family is up there.

Davis: What about Alphius?

Watson: He lived in Washington, I never knew him.

Davis: He never lived in this area, just George and Charles and Bert?

Watson: Yes.

Davis: It does say how many acres George Some bought?

Watson: Bought? He didn't buy land. He married my mother and they inherited the ranch here. My grandmother left it to—

Davis: So when its talking about him living in the Dry Creek Valley, he was already married to your mother.

Watson: Oh, yes. I even remember this. It was written when I was eight years old. It says so right here.

Davis: So he never bought anything?

Watson: When my grandmother died, she left the property to the family. That's why it was run by Some and Bells. My aunt married George Bell and my mother married George Some, so it was the Some and Bell Ranch all the time until we bought down here. And they divided the ranch.

Davis: It was my understanding that your grandfather came to the Dry Creek area.

Watson: My grandfather, I know that they came around the Horn, I just took it for granted they settled up there. She was an invalid for quite a while.

Davis: "Up there" meaning Canyon Road?



Watson: I had a picture one time, I don't know what happened to it, a picture of her in a wheelchair down at Bert Phillips' house, now Teldeschis'. I know that that's where he pointed out where she lived.

Davis: Your father pointed out?

Watson: Yes.

Davis: So you are assuming that when your grandparents came over, around the Horn, that they settled where Bernier's live now.

Watson: Yes.

Davis: But you haven't any idea of whose property they bought or how many acres they had or if there was a house there?

Watson: No, and I don't have anyway of finding out either—there's nobody left that would know.

Davis: What about the house on this property? Was there ever a house before this one?

Watson: I've asked that question many times, too. And no one seems to know that if they built the house or whether it was here.

Davis: And it was this house?

Watson: Oh, no. The house over the hill. This house [9101 West Dry Creek] was built in 1909.

Davis: Oh, it's relatively recent. [chuckles]

You were talking about homesteading in Grass Valley—

Watson: I don't know whether there was a house or not. The old Reilly house is the only thing I've heard it called. But it wasn't that house, because they lived just down the road. Their house must have been torn down or burned down or something.

Davis: I've already asked you about neighbors. Neighbors of the Phillips were too long ago—

[conversation between Mrs. Watson and her daughter]





- Davis: You were talking about Sam Heaton, and that was the husband of Black, Bertha Black.
- Watson: Yes, Bertha Black married a Heaton.
- Davis: He came out to mine—
- Watson: He came out with D. D. Phillips from Missouri to mine—
- Davis: And that paper you're reading definitely says D. D. Phillips came out to mine in El Dorado County.
- Watson: For a while anyway, unless he decided to mine after he got here.
- You know when they [your ancestors] marry and then remarry and have another family and there are step relatives involved, the children are half his and half hers, it becomes very confusing and complicated.
- Davis: It certainly does, especially as you get further back. When it happens to your parents it's a little easier to keep it straight, like when you have a step-father and half brothers and sisters. But when it goes back several generations, it is tough.

TAPE RESTART

- Davis: Do you know whether your grandparents sold property to anyone?
- Watson: No, I don't think they did as he died so young. He was 43 and left a family. They were striving to keep things going. I really don't know how they did it.
- Davis: Do you have the same amount of property now as the original amount?
- Watson: No, we've sold off some.
- Davis: Did your father sell any of it?
- Watson: No.
- Davis: It's just your generation that has sold some of it?
- Watson: Yes.



- Davis: And you say that you don't have any memories of your grandparents because you never knew them?
- Watson: They were all dead before I was born. I didn't ask about them, because you don't like to bring those subjects up to your parents because it seemed to me that they always took things so seriously and they always just left those things out.
- Davis: There was an awful lot that they left out. [chuckles]
- Watson: They didn't talk much about family. You're not too interested, you're a kid, you're not interested, it's not what [you want to know], if you don't know somebody, well, you aren't interested at least I wasn't.
- Davis: The occupation has always been farming?
- Watson: Yes. The mining and the farming.
- Davis: In this area [Dry Creek Valley] it has always been farming?
- Watson: Well, it talks about someone being a furrier [in the family history, looks for reference].
- Davis: Do you know what crops your grandparents grew? And when I say grandparents, of course, you can do either set of grandparents.
- Watson: The first few years they had a walnut orchard. [on West Dry Creek Phillips Ranch] When my mother and father got married, walnuts were down here and they called it the Walnut Grove Ranch. But that's way back.
- Davis: This was called the Walnut Grove Ranch?
- Watson: I have a a picture in there [family history] that shows this house when it was first built. It has Walnut Grove Ranch written across it, and I heard them say something about it.
- Davis: Who built this house?
- Watson: My folks had it built. I don't know who built it, who the carpenter was. It was built in 1909. My sister might know a few things, but she's always asking me, and I say, "Why are you asking me, *you* were here before I was?"
- Davis: Do you remember the walnuts?



- Watson: No, they took them all out. They had put prunes in and had some peaches and then grapes. Anything to [help balance out nature], if one crop failed than the others took over.
- Davis: Probably mostly prunes?
- Watson: Yes, during the time of Prohibition, of course, the grapes weren't worth anything so they got started with the prunes. That's the story of life around here—you go from one crop to another.
- Davis: What other families are you related to? Some of this is obvious, I know, but I thought I would write it down anyway. You are related to the Phillips—
- Watson: They are all over the place.
- Davis: I bet. And you are related to the Bells?
- Watson: Yes.
- Davis: And the Hendricks. But I guess there are no more Hendricks? Who else are you related to that is still around? Are there any Phillips left?
- Watson: You have to go down to Patty Schmidt, see [because] women that are married have a different name, and of course, she has her son and two daughters. She has a son that lives in the original family home—Brian Schmidt. And she has two married daughters [Diane Johannsen and Kay Robinson], she would be a good one to talk to. She's very interested in this.
- Davis: She's the one that wrote up the booklet, *Vintage Memories*. She wrote a couple pages about the Phillips family in that.
- Watson: She's gone really into it. Maybe she knows most of this, Duvall dug this up and passed it along to me.
- Davis: And you can't think of any other families that are in the area that you are related to?
- Watson: I'm thinking. I should have told you to let me know in advance if you had anything special to ask, questions that needed research. I really don't have any one to ask, except for Duvall, he's the only one I can depend on. He's going to be 91 his next birthday. His mind is sharp. But he really doesn't want to talk on that thing [tape recorder], so it's hard.





Davis: I'm not sure he wants to talk at all.

Watson: Well maybe not. [My daughters wanted to know so] I had to keep saying, "The girls are really interested and want to know about the family history." People keep picking at me, but maybe if I had been born first I would have been more interested, but I came along ten years later. I didn't get to be with these people, everyone was dying off about the time I was born.

Davis: Are your brother and sister still alive?

Watson: I don't have a brother now, he died.

Davis: And that was Phil?

Watson: Yes. And my sister, she lives in the City and she'll be 86 next birthday, she's doing fine. But she's forgotten a lot and she asks me what I remember. But all I say is, "Geez Phyllis, I came along at the tail end and I didn't know."

Davis: How much older is she than you?

Watson: Ten years.

Davis: And how much older was your brother than you?

Watson: Fifteen. So you see that kind of makes it difficult.

Davis: Well, we've kind of gotten past your great-grandparents and grandparents—Your father's name was George Some and your mother was—

Watson: Mary Ellen Phillips, or Mollie.

Davis: Was your father born here in Dry Creek Valley?

Watson: Yes.

Davis: Do you know what house?

Watson: I suppose up there where Bernier lives.

END OF SIDE ONE

Davis: Your mother was born here in Dry Creek Valley. And what was this ranch called? What was it called when she was born? Was she born on this ranch?



- Watson: Yes, she was. My aunt was born in Grass Valley. I don't know what they called it at that time. I'm going by what I've heard, they had those big walnut orchard and it just got called—
- Davis: Maybe that's what it was called. What did you call it? Walnut?
- Watson: Walnut Grove Ranch.
- Davis: I like walnut trees.
- Watson: Well, they are starting to get husk flies in them, I am going to have to get something to—
- Davis: You have some still that are remnants?
- Watson: Just one tree. We had three and cut two down, we kept the best one. There are a lot of husk flies in there every year and you have to spray. It's a headache.
- Davis: It's such a big tree.
- Watson: What do I do with them? I pick the walnuts, shell them, put them in plastic bags and give them away. [chuckles] I think I'm going to get rid of the tree, it's too much work.
- Davis: The brothers of George were Alphius, Charles and Bert. Alphius who never lived here and Charles and Bert who lived further down Dry Creek. And the siblings of Mollie (Mary) were Amelia (Annie), Maude and George.
- What schools did these people go to, do you have any idea? Starting with your father. Do you have any idea what school your father went to?
- Watson: No. My mother went to Pena School.
- Davis: I don't know if there was a Canyon School then. There was no Canyon School when my uncle [Al Glaser] started school. He had to go down to Dry Creek School.
- Watson: Was there a Hamilton School?
- Davis: Yes, there was a Hamilton School up near the dam [Lake Sonoma].



- Watson: It seems to me that he [my father] went to Hamilton school. I don't know for sure.
- Davis: That might have been the closest one, unless he went down to Dry Creek School also. But your mother went to Pena School.
- Do you have any idea who their classmates or teachers were? Not your father since you're not sure what school he went to. Do you have any idea who your mother's classmates or teachers
- Watson: I heard them mention names, but I don't remember.
- Davis: Did either one of them go to high school?
- Watson: No.
- Davis: Neither one. So your father stayed home after elementary school and worked on the ranch?
- Watson: Yes, he wasn't too well and he was sick at one time—he had tuberculosis at one time. But they got him over it, a very odd way too. The doctor said he would die if they didn't follow these orders. He had to breathe through a turkey quill, walk up this certain mountain every day and breathe through this turkey quill. Can you imagine doing that? And that would strengthen the lungs and he would get over it.
- Davis: What mountain?
- Watson: Somewhere he lived, over there somewhere. That always stuck in my mind, because he always said he could remember how hard it was to breathe. Just imagine, not much air coming through and you had to climb that mountain. But he got over it and never had a sign of it afterwards. He was cured. There was a picture somewhere, they took a picture of him, because they didn't think he would survive. And [in the picture] he is so pale and frail. And he was the healthiest man in the world in the end.
- Davis: Your mother would have gone to school and then—how old was she when they got married? She must have stayed home to help her mother out?
- Watson: Oh she did. They all had to work hard because there was no father.
- Davis: And it was a big ranch, too. The father was go—





- Watson: I don't know how they managed. They did have to stay on the ranch and take care of it. They were married in 1901, I believe. And she was born in 1879. That would make her 22, I think that's just about it.
- Davis: So she worked on the ranch a long time, probably, before she was married, if she never went to high school at all.
- Watson: Yes.
- Davis: Do you have any idea how old your father was when they got married?
- Watson: Well, he was six or seven years older than my mother, I think it was seven.
- Davis: [Looking through family history] She has it here that they were married in 1900.
- Watson: Well, we had to figure that out, we decided that things didn't work out so we decided we need to change one of the dates. [chuckles]
- Davis: Probably the birth of a child.
- Oh this is interesting—He married her in 1900 and she married him in 1901—[everyone laughs] right, she wanted to think about it a little longer.
- Watson: We were laughing over this.
- Davis: Okay, whatever, either 1900 or 1901.
- Watson: We don't want to start a scandal here.
- Davis: And he was born in 1873 he would be 27 or 28.
- Watson: I guess so, I never thought of that before.
- Davis: So he had worked a long time too, before they were married.
- Do you have any idea, this is an obvious question, how they met? They didn't live very far apart, but—
- Watson: Yeah, they didn't live very far apart and I don't know the details, but he was interested, he was a farmer and everybody tried to marry into whatever they needed the



most, I guess. If you are running a restaurant, you marry a cook.

Davis: So he was looking for a good husky farm girl.

Watson: I imagine that had a lot to do with a lot of those marriages. It was a good marriage.

Davis: Do you know where they got married?

Watson: Yes. They were married in the Occidental Hotel in Santa Rosa, the old Occidental Hotel.

Davis: Was it a very big wedding? Did she have a white gown and bouquet?

Watson: I don't know.

Davis: They were married in 1901. The first of their children was Phil, Phillip, he was the oldest. Oh, I see why you mean that it doesn't work out. He was born in 1901. [everybody laughs]

Watson: Ardis is scribbling all over the place, they were married long enough that's about all I can say.

Davis: Well, they were married in January and he was born in December. So he was born first and I assume here on the ranch. And he married—a Watson? It says here Carlotta Watson.

Watson: Oh, no. That's Wilbur's sister.

Davis: Oh this is your spouse's brothers and sisters. Okay. Of course, of course. So did he (Phil) marry?

Watson: He had two wives, three wives. Gladys Miller was his first one. The second one was Audrey Hunkins.

Davis: Did he have any children?

Watson: Yes, one with the first wife. Well, he actually had two, but one died at birth.

Davis: What is the name of that children?

Watson: The one that is alive is Janet Marie Strack.

Davis: And no children from Audrey.



- Watson: No. And then he was married to Inez Harrison at the end.
- Davis: So he had three wives. My father did the same thing, my father had four.
- Harry tells me that he [Phil] used to live [in Geyserville] he was a CHP officer and he used to live where I remember the Krons living—some relation to Jean Black.
- Watson: Her father.
- Davis: I think it was her step-father.
- Watson: No, I think it was her father.
- Davis: Then it was her step-mother. He was a very nice man.
- Watson: There was Kron, Jean and Glenna, what was the other girl's name—Bertha, they had odd names.
- Davis: I can't think of his name.
- Watson: Roy.
- Davis: Roy Kron, a very nice man.
- Watson: She was too.
- Davis: Did Phil live in that house before the Krons or after the Krons—Next to the Blacks?
- Watson: They were there before he was, oh yes. They bought that house from whomever lived there. Who did live there? They were right next door.
- Davis: The Krons were there in the '50s when I was in high school—Roy and Margaret, that was his wife's name at that time, Margaret.
- Watson: They used to live down West Dry Creek, up on the hill, when I was going to high school.
- Wasn't there a Mrs. Bolser that lived in Geyserville? Maybe lived in one of those houses there?
- Davis: I think you're right.





- Watson: And I think that she's the sister of Mrs. Enzenauer down the line here. I think they may have bought that house from the Bolser's.
- Davis: The Krons brought it from Mrs. Bolser?
- Watson: I think so. I'm guessing that's where she used to live, she was a nice lady.
- Davis: Now, Phyllis, who did she marry?
- Watson: She was married to a Jack Keller.
- Davis: Married more than once?
- Watson: She's now married twice. She has one daughter and her name is Fay Hagen.
- Davis: Then the second marriage?
- Watson: Then she's married to Boyer Hicks, really actually, James B. Hicks- Boyer but that's what they called him. He died.
- Davis: When did he pass away?
- Watson: In 1989.
- Rochester: And they have one daughter.
- Watson: That's right, Joyce Morias.
- Rochester: I think it is M-o-r-r-i-a-s.
- Davis: Well, we're getting close [to the present].
- Watson: You don't have to have their children do you?
- Davis: No. If they lived around here it would be different. You have all the people on here that live around here—Jessica and George—we have all of those.
- Davis: Now, where were you born?
- Watson: At the Seawell Sanatarium in Healdsburg.
- Davis: Sanatarium? or Sanatorium?

[Everybody laughs]



- Watson: You know what it is now? It's Camellia Inn [Bed and Breakfast on North Street] in Healdsburg, it was a real pretty place. It used to be a beautiful place. They didn't have a hospital in Healdsburg, only that sanitarium.
- Davis: Seawell was the doctor?
- Watson: Yes, Dr. Seawell.
- Davis: He probably lived right there, didn't he, it was his house.
- Watson: He did. They had it fixed very nicely, with lots of windows—
- Davis: Your siblings I have here are, Phil and Phyllis, that's kind of interesting that they would have a Phil and a Phyllis and then you come along and you're Ruth.
- Watson: [Chuckles] You can see I'm the odd one.
- Davis: You would think they would give you a "Ph" name too.
- Watson: You see, I probably was an afterthought. [chuckles] I got that figured out when I was real young.
- Davis: How did that make you feel?
- Watson: I guess I'm lucky I got here. [chuckles]
- Davis: I wondered how people feel if they think they're mistakes.
- Watson: It doesn't make a difference, if you count up all the mistakes in the world, there would be quite a few.
- Davis: I don't know, there would either be a lot of a world or none of a world.
- Phil, did he only work for the CHP?
- Watson: No, he worked at Mare Island [Vallejo, Navy Shipyards] for many years.
- Davis: Was he there during the war?
- Watson: Yes.
- Davis: So he became a CHP officer later on?
- Watson: No. He was in the Navy first, when he got out of the Navy he went into the CHP, then—



Davis: He worked at Mare Island.

Watson: Until he retired.

Davis: Did he live there? Or did he commute?

Watson: He lived there in Vallejo.

Davis: Did he live in Geyserville when he was a CHP officer?

Watson: No.

Davis: So he didn't live in Geyserville until after he retired.

Watson: He lived in Healdsburg when he was married to his first wife— Geez, this is going back so far. Then he worked at the Ferry Building, as a cop down there. And then from then on, when he got out of that, he went to work in Vallejo as a welder, and he stayed at that until he retired.

Davis: When did he live in Geyserville?

Watson: After his retirement, then he moved up to Geyserville. He lived in Sonoma for a while, after he married his last wife. They lived down there for quite some time.

Davis: Now Phyllis, has she been a housewife?

Watson: All her life.

Davis: Where has she lived?

Watson: San Francisco.

Davis: Has she always lived in San Francisco?

Watson: She has since her marriage to Boyer Hicks. And before that, she lived in Santa Rosa with her first husband, and they separated.

Davis: How did she ever get to San Francisco?

Watson: Oh, she always loved San Francisco. He worked out of there. He was a radio operator on a ship.

Davis: Mr. Hicks?





- Watson: Yes. He would go on these trips to the Philippines and what-not. He had an apartment down there. And she loved it, so different than me, I don't want anything to do with it [chuckles], she loves it, she just thinks it's wonderful, so that's great.
- Davis: Which school did all of you go to?
- Watson: Pena School, we all did.
- Davis: Who were your classmates?
- Watson: Oh, gee, do you want them all?
- Davis: Well, I guess I'm asking two different questions. That's a one room school, so who did you go to school with? You can answer with classmates. Because it was eight grades, I don't think there were that many in your class as such.
- Watson: No, ten to fifteen would be the top for the whole school. There were the Black children—do you want their first names?
- Davis: Well yes, the oldest maybe, Wes?
- Watson: He's too old, Virginia's too old—
- Rochester: You're stepping on toes here.
- Watson: You have to go down to George Henry Black. Maybe you don't know him, you're so much younger than him. He's dead now. George Henry, Hollis Black, he lives down the creek. Helen Jamison now, and Betty, I don't know who she's married to. Then there's the Catelinis, the Gelatinis, the Santinis, the Mancinis— [everyone laughs] I'm not kidding you when I say all these names.
- Davis: I know, I remember the Santinis.
- Watson: The Mancini?
- Davis: No, I don't.
- Watson: The Guadagnis.
- Davis: Which Guadagni did you go to school with?
- Watson: Dante and Bruno and Fred—



- Davis: Jim didn't go to this school. Which one is Lawrence's father.
- Watson: Fred.
- Davis: He passed away a few years ago.
- Watson: How do you remember all this?
- Davis: There are very few things I remember, we're just lucky today. [chuckles]
- Watson: You can right off the top of your head say Fred died two years ago, and you're right on too, because I know when it was.
- Davis: It's because I had this experience of trying to interview Jim.
- Rochester: That must have been an experience.
- Watson: I picked Jim because Fred had passed away recently, within a year or so, and it was about a year ago that I tried interviewing Jim and that was unsuccessful. In fact my mother said to me, "Northern Dry Creek Valley seems to be a real problem for you, doesn't it?" So I don't know whether I'm going to make any inroad, see you've given me my first opportunity in northern Dry Creek Valley, no one else wanted to see me. [chuckles]
- Rochester: Did it make you feel unwanted?
- Davis: It made me feel very unwanted, yes. I feel a lot better.
- Rochester: Don't you remember Jim talking about dreading this interview?
- Davis: He did?
- Rochester: He said, "This lady's going to come and interview me!" That was her [Louise].
- Watson: Oh, my goodness sakes.
- Davis: He just disappeared. My mother and I got there and nobody was there. He never called to let me know. He canceled it once or twice, and then I thought everything was fine, and we got there and he just wasn't there—
- Watson: That's funny.



- Davis: It wasn't funny at all.
- Watson: He lives with Tina, his daughter, now, he doesn't live up there anymore.
- Davis: Is the house vacant?
- Watson: I think it is, I don't get up that way. He's down there, he was having problems, so Tina's taking care of him. He's 90 something, 91 or 92.
- Davis: Were there just three Guadagnis? Dante, Bruno, and Fred? Was there a girl?
- Watson: Oh, yes. There was—Bruna.
- Davis: There was a Bruno and a Bruna?
- Watson: A Bruno and a Bruna, Lena and Lenna.
- Davis: I tried [to get an interview with] Lena too.
- Watson: Now we're not talking one year. We're talking through out, some would graduate and others would step in. And there was Bernice Demostene (Rose), Annie Catelini—
- Rochester: Are these all at Pena School?
- Watson: I'm going through the ones I went to school with more than any, all through the years.
- Rochester: —I thought you were getting into high school?
- Watson: Oh no, I'm not touching high school, good grief we would never get done. Ann Catelini, Sam Catelini and Joe Catelini—and Dina Catelini. This is so funny.
- Davis: What about the Gelatinis? I hope you don't remember all these names, we've got a long way to go here. [chuckles]
- Watson: Oh, yes, we have a long ways to go. I could forget awfully quick.
- Davis: Okay, lets forget them, what about the Santinis? Just name one.
- Watson: Oh, there's a lot of them, let's just say Paulina Santini.





Davis: That's a good one. Gracious me, are any of these people still around?

Watson: And Angelo Michelli.

Davis: I remember that name. We had a Michelli kid with us.

Rochester: Eddie.

Watson: That's his son. M-i-c-h-e-l-l-i.

Davis: Oh, so it's an Italian Michelli, I was trying to turn it into an Irish McKelly.

Watson: And Gilda, his sister.

Davis: What was the fellow's name?

Watson: Angelo and Gilda.  
Mary Guadagni has my [school] picture over there.

Rochester: She still has it?

Watson: Yes, she told me to stop by and pick it up, but I never have.

Davis: Who were your teachers?

Watson: Well, there was a teacher, Miss O'Reilly up here. She lived back in the hills and walked out every day a mile and a half, every day.

Davis: Was she related to Kathleen [Reilly]?

Watson: She was O'Reilly. Jennie O'Reilly was her name.

Davis: And for years she was a teacher?

Watson: She was my teacher, up until 7th grade. Then it was Mrs. Henley. Remember the Henleys at all? She was a teacher over in Geyserville.

Davis: There were some Henleys, it was before my time, but I know a Mrs. Henley.

Watson: She was before your time, Madge Henley.



Davis: Yes, and then she was the Principal over at the Geyserville school. And I think her daughter taught there too. I think it was a mother-daughter team.

Watson: I never heard of that.

Davis: Well, maybe I'm getting it confused, there was a mother-daughter team, whether it was the Henleys I'm not sure. But I think she was the Principal over there.

Watson: I know she was a teacher there for a long time, she could have been.

Rochester: Do you know Mr. Vassar died?

Davis: Yes, Donna and I were asked to try to figure out what years he was there, that was an interesting experience.

Watson: They didn't write much in the paper, fact is I was wondering if it was him, but I knew he had a son named Rick.

Davis: So those were your two teachers, Mrs. O'Reilly from 1st through 7th and Mrs. Henley was your 8th grade.

Watson: Well, Mrs. Henley was my 7th grade teacher, 7th and 8th. The only reason for that was—don't change it, but let me tell you how upset—because I won't—

Davis: It sounds interesting—

Watson: It goes to show you how it can hurt a person's feelings—

Tape Restarts

Davis: Okay. Now this was a one room school, and all these kids are in it with one teacher. Now the school house is no longer there?

Watson: No, they torn it down in 1936—37. No it was later than that, Because we were up north at the time, it was 1940, something like that.

Davis: Was it vacant?

Watson: They consolidated, not too many years after I graduated and went to Geyserville [schools]. It just stayed vacant until they torn it down.



- Davis: Was Olive Bella teacher there?
- Watson: She took over after Mrs. Henley. I think there was another teacher in-between, Olive didn't teach there very long.
- Davis: Olive says she taught there until it closed.
- Watson: Yes, but she didn't say when it closed?
- Davis: Yes, it closed, I was very interested in this, it closed after I started first grade. Because she said she taught Lawrence Guadagni first grade at Pena School.
- Watson: What year would that be?
- Davis: And we started in '42 in the first grade. So she must have taught him from September of '42 through June of '43. So the last year would be '43.
- Watson: Well, it could be. Because we were married in 1936 and we lived up north. I can remember my dad. He was also clerk of the school up here, so he said, "When you come down you won't see Pena School anymore, it's gone!" We only lived up there nine years, so somewhere in those years—
- Davis: You mean they torn it down soon after it stopped being a school?
- Watson: If [Olive] says she quit in '43, I think that they must right away have torn it down. It has to be before '45, because we moved down here in '45.
- Davis: And it was gone then?
- Watson: Right.
- Davis: Whose property is it on now, whose property was it then?
- Watson: Well, there was one acre allotted for the school. How do they do this with the school districts?
- Davis: Maybe it was owned by the County?
- Watson: I think maybe so. And then Santini, he lived right next to it, I think he bought it. [The property] adjoined him and us too.
- Davis: Which side of the road was it on?





- Watson: On this side.
- Davis: On the west side. Between here and Yoakim Bridge?
- Watson: It was just up the top of the hill, there's a house there now, a really nice house just before you make the turn. The Santinis lived on the turn.
- Davis: What's the color of the house?
- Watson: What's the color Joanne, gray or blue? Well they painted it, it's pretty. You can't miss it. They have just built this house or a garage—
- Rochester: It looks like a garage with an house on top
- Watson: It's real cute, real attractive. Then out in the front there is this huge rock deal with flowers.
- Davis: And that's where the school was?
- Watson: Exactly where the house is, little south of there, on that one acre of ground.
- Davis: Did it have a cloak room, or anything like that?
- Watson: End room—two entry rooms and the big old school room.
- Davis: What about water or bathrooms?
- Watson: We had a pump house.
- Davis: There was no running water in the school?
- Watson: No. And you pumped your water, to get a drink of water you pumped it out. You had your paper cups there. Most of the time we had to make our cups out of paper towels.
- Davis: And there were outhouses?
- Watson: The outhouses were up on the hill, one for the boys and one for the girls.
- Davis: And the school year, I suppose was the same as our school year?
- Watson: Yes, except for one thing different. They kind of went by the crops. If it was going to be an early crop, then we got to



start a little earlier. They could never set a date until they saw how the crops were going to be.

Davis: I remember when we went to school, school always started later than it does now. There was no way we would have started the day after Labor Day. Because we had to—

Watson: Kids don't help anymore.

Davis: That's right, because we all had to pick prunes. I remember, I have a September 20th birthday, and I can remember, often, I was not in school by my birthday.

Did you go to high school?

Watson: Oh, God yes. [laughs]

Davis: Where?

Watson: Healdsburg.

Davis: Oh, you went to Healdsburg. Why did you go to Healdsburg.

Watson: I wanted to go to Healdsburg. [chuckles]

Davis: But you were in the Geyserville district?

Watson: Yes, it was a big old fight to get to go to Healdsburg. There were more subjects—you know how it was—

Davis: Did any of these kids go to Healdsburg too? [from elementary school]

Watson: Let me look them over [takes list].

I don't know about the Blacks, where they finally went to.

Davis: Santini, I think there was a Santini that went to Geyserville, from seeing old year books.

Watson: Denise Demostene.

Davis: Went to Healdsburg?

Watson: Yes. And some of the Blacks, some of them went I'm sure, but George Henry probably would have gone.

Davis: Probably a lot of them wouldn't have gone [to high school]?



- Watson: Yes, a lot of the Italian kids didn't go.
- Davis: But you went to high school, and you graduated?
- Watson: Yes, I graduated in 1935.
- Davis: What did you do after graduation?
- Watson: I was home for part of the year. Then I went up to visit, it was actually my husband's sister—I wasn't married then—I got a job in up there in a sweet shop.
- Davis: Where's "up there"?
- Watson: In Scotia. I guess you would wonder where I'm talking about.
- Davis: It could have been Grass Valley, for all I know.
- [Everyone laughs]
- Davis: Why did you go there?
- Watson: To visit his sister.
- Davis: How did you know his sister if she lived in Scotia?
- Watson: Well, he lived down here and I knew his sister, and she wanted me to come up and visit, and I did and she worked at the hotel.
- Davis: So you already knew Wilbur?
- Watson: Oh yes. We went together nearly all the time through high school.
- Davis: So he also went to Healdsburg High School?
- Watson: No, he didn't go to high school. He went to work because he had to help out the family.
- Davis: And where did his family live?
- Watson: His family, they lived up in Scotia for awhile too, that's how Carlotta got started. So then he came down here on the ranch, because his grandmother and grandfather wanted him to take over their ranch. So he came down here, times were pretty bad then.





Davis: And who were his grandparents?

Watson: That was George Watson and Elsie.

Davis: And where was their ranch?

Watson: Do you know where Nivan Buchignani lives right now? About a mile down here, on this side of the creek?

Davis: Are we talking about on the west side of the creek?

Watson: Yes, it's about a mile down there.

Davis: Before you turn?

Joann: Do you know where the Brodys live?

Davis: I don't know where anybody lives on West Dry Creek Road. Anyway, before you get to the curve that takes you to Yoakim Bridge Road?

Watson: No, you go some distance further down.

Davis: Oh, past Yoakim Bridge Road. I don't know that part of West Dry Creek.

Watson: Where Raymond Burr, you know where he is?

Davis: Yes, I have been there—I took one of my students—

Rochester: It's not very far [away]

Watson: —about a mile from here.

Davis: So that's where he [Wilbur's grandparents] lived. Do you remember when you met him? You wouldn't have gone to the same grammar school?

Watson: No, but we'd always known the family.

Rochester: He came down and saw her when she was born, in her little basket.

Watson: [Chuckles]

Davis: How old was he at that time?

Watson: About seven, we were seven years apart. He was in school, and my sister brought all the kids down from school



because she had a new baby sister. He came down and I was just born. From that school up there.

Davis: Pena School?

Watson: Yes. So that's how we met! [Chuckles]

Davis: Your sister was a student there and had to bring all the kids to see the new baby. I bet he was so impressed, at seven or so.

Watson: Oh yeah. I bet he hated it at that age, "You have to come down!" [laughs]

Davis: For the most part, he worked on the ranch.

Watson: Yes.

Davis: Then when you two were married, where did you live first?

Watson: In Scotia.

Davis: You stayed in Scotia for awhile—

Watson: We lived there for nine years.

Davis: When were you married?

Watson: 1936.

Davis: You didn't work up there real long?

Watson: No. He didn't want me to work after we were married, so I didn't work very long. We lived there for a couple of years, then we bought a place outside of Scotia, and got started.

Davis: How long did you live there?

Watson: Until we came down here in 1945.

Davis: Were the [kids], was Joanne born up there?

Watson: Joanne was born at the Scotia Hospital in 1938. Then we had another little girl, that we lost, that was Carol. She died at two months, and she was born in '41. Then there was Ardis, born in '44.

Davis: Then she was born there too.



- Watson: Yes. Cheryl was the only one born down here. She was born in 1948.
- Davis: So you've had all girls.
- Watson: Yes, all girls and I'm not sorry.
- Davis: You now have grandsons. You've had a taste of what it's like [raising boys].
- Watson: I have son-in-laws, three good son-in-laws, so they kind of take the place [of sons].





## **Introduction to Interview of Andrew Frei**

Joseph Vercelli, wine historian, interviewed Andrew Frei a grandson of the founder of the Frei Winery, Dry Creek Valley near Healdsburg. His grandfather, Andrew Frei came from Switzerland and settled in San Francisco. After establishing a profitable furniture manufacturing business, he began looking for a solid investment, and started the Frei family's long term involvement in grape growing. In 1882, Andrew Frei purchased 415 acres of land seven miles west of Santa Rosa in the laguna area. This land was undeveloped, he had it cleared and planted to apple orchards and grape vines. He next purchased vineyards south of Windsor around 1885, but had his mind set on a plant in Dry Creek Valley and sold the Windsor property shortly after. He bought the Dry Creek vineyards and winery in 1890.

The site of the Frei Winery was originally called Laurel Hill vineyard and winery, a property purchased and developed by Charles J. Dunz, a Swiss immigrant, in 1884. By 1885, nearly 150 acres of grape vines had been planted and he had a winery under construction, selling to Andrew Frei in December of 1890. Andrew's sons, Walter and Louis, took over plant operations the following decade, eventually the name was changed to Frei Brothers. Prohibition closed the winery, as it did for the majority of California wineries, with it reopening at Repeal in 1934. After Walter's death, Louis and his son Andrew (Andy) took over control in 1946 and bought out the remaining relatives. After joining a couple of industry attempts at co-operative selling ventures, the Frei property was ultimately sold to Gallo winery in the 1950's who retained the historic Frei name.



**Andrew Frei**  
Frei Family Wine History

Interviewed by Joseph Vercelli  
at the Vercelli home in Healdsburg

Thursday, August 17, 1982

Transcription by Gail Ryan, Healdsburg      January 1995

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Joseph Vercelli: Andy can you tell me how your family got into the wine industry? Hence they migrated—where in Europe did your maternal and fraternal grandparents come from, and then, your father and mother were they natives of America?

Andrew Frei: Joe, my grandfather and grandmother both came from Switzerland. My grandmother came from St. Gallen, in fact they had an inn in St. Gallen, I have since been in Switzerland but I couldn't find it, it had been torn down. My grandfather was an orphan, nobody wanted him. He came over to this country, just before the Gold Rush, landed in New York like Art Kingman did. Worked in New York until he could get enough money, then he came through the Isthmus of Panama and located in San Francisco in 1849. He had a furniture factory, a very, very successful furniture factory, it comprised of about 250 employees. But both Walter and Louie, my uncle and father, were born on Rincon Hill in San Francisco. My grandfather got burnt in the early part of the 1880's on what were called *gold bricks*, which was comparable to the stock crash of 1929. So he said "Enough of that," he said, "I'm going to start buying some property." So he came up to Sonoma County and originally he bought the Windsor Winery, in Windsor, California, that was the start of Sonoma Wines.

Vercelli: Did they call it the Windsor Winery at that time? And do you have any idea as to what time this took place?

Frei: This was in the early part of the 1880's because as far as I can ascertain he bought both the winery and the apple properties around 1882-1885, in that time slot.

Vercelli: You aren't referring to the Windsor Co-op?



- Frei: No. I'm talking about the old one that is on the hill which is beyond the co-op on the right hand side, just about a quarter of a mile down, south. That's where the originator of the Windsor Vineyards over here started.
- Vercelli: Rod(ney) Strong.
- Frei: Exactly.
- Vercelli: Is that off of Pleasant Ave.? No, that would be south.
- Frei: It was just as you get to the water district in there, It's below the co-op where Randy Bastoni is. Below that on the right hand side, it's an old, old building.
- Vercelli: This is the first time I've heard that there was a winery in there.
- Do you remember Armand Casazza? He was a grape grower and he was one of the founding fathers of the Sonoma County Co-op Winery. He was very active.
- Frei: I remember the name quite definitely.
- Vercelli: He passed on quite early.
- Frei: I don't believe he had the Windsor Winery very long. He had his eye on a plant out in Dry Creek (Valley) (Dunz Winery and Vineyards).
- Vercelli: That was your grandfather.
- Frei: Yes.
- Vercelli: What was his name?
- Frei: Andrew.
- Vercelli: So you were named after your grandfather?
- Frei: Yes, I was named after my grandfather. I have a little story there. My dad named me when I was born, Louis Andrew Frei and he raised so much hell that they had to change it back to Andrew Louis Frei.
- Vercelli: Where did your grandfather Andrew marry, in this country?
- Frei: In San Francisco.





- Vercelli: And whom did he marry?
- Frei: He married Louise Zweisel from St. Gallen, Switzerland, and her brother had a house down here in Windsor right across from Raleys (Brooks Road), right where the freeway is.
- Vercelli: You say he had his eye on the Dry Creek property. Do you know when he planted his first grapes?
- Frei: They were already planted there. Not the apple orchard but the grapes (were planted).
- Vercelli: Of course, the apple orchard is down below—
- Frei: It was all in timber, on Guerneville Road, where the Laguna is.
- Vercelli: Do you have any idea as to the size of the winery that they built out in Dry Creek?
- Frei: I've seen pictures years ago, it was so small. It couldn't have been more than 30-40,000 gallons, if that. It was very small.
- Vercelli: Do you have any idea as to the grape that they grew?
- Frei: Primarily the old time ones, Alicante, Chasselas—I don't know whether we had Zinfandel at that time or not—yes, we did, we had them out in the apple orchard.
- Vercelli: In about 1890, according to some records that I have seen, Zinfandel was the most common variety grown in Sonoma County. I'd say of the red varieties maybe 70 percent was Zinfandel. Then the others were spread out among a little Alicante, a little Mataro, a little Cabernet Sauvignon, very little Pinot Noir, a little Carignane, and a little Petite Sirah. And as far as the whites were concerned there was a little Gutedel and Chasselas, there were small holdings of Johannesburg Riesling in the Sonoma area, Gundlach-Bundschu.
- Frei: Carl Bundschu.
- Vercelli: Do you remember Carl?
- Frei: Lord yes, we used to go over there.
- Vercelli: He managed Inglenook in 1934-35.
- Frei: Absolutely.



- Vercelli: He was a great man. I remember that vicarious voice. When he would address a group, the walls of the building shook.
- Did your granddad just have two children?
- Frei: No, he had a middle boy Andrew, that I was named for, he died just before I was born. He had three sons.
- Vercelli: Do you know when your grandfather passed on?
- Frei: I know exactly when, I went to the funeral in 1920.
- Vercelli: How old was he?
- Frei: He was 96.
- Vercelli: He lived to a very, very ripe old age.
- Frei: He was kicked in the head as a young child and he had a silver plate in his age, even in those days. He lived to 96.
- Vercelli: Isn't that amazing, the medical profession advanced so far?
- Frei: Yes, this was in Switzerland.
- Vercelli: Tell me about Uncle Walter, did he have any children?
- Frei: Yes, he has a daughter, Mary Louise, she lives in San Francisco on 19th Ave. We brought her out when Walter died in 1945. I say "we" because I was a partner at that time.
- Vercelli: Do you recall about the early marketing of your grandfather's wines? Where would he market?
- Frei: It was always bulk. We always were.
- Vercelli: Would you say he sold locally or San Francisco, most of these people I gather would ship wines to San Francisco.
- Frei: Yes, that is what I think.
- Vercelli: They would put them on at Chiquita Station.
- Frei: That was our loading platform for grapes.
- Vercelli: Prior to that people that shipped wines to the East would come there in preference to Healdsburg, for some reason or other, which was only a distance of three miles.



- Frei: In those days with horses—three miles would make quite a difference and the roads weren't paved, Joe.
- Vercelli: What was your involvement in recent times (in the wine industry)? You went to work for the Wine Institute. You mentioned that you have an equity in the winery, and you have bought your cousin's equity.
- Frei: My dad and I bought out (the relatives) when Walter died, it was a partnership you know and we bought out the other half of the business.
- Vercelli: From that point on, from 1945, what do you remember about Northern Sonoma Wines, you went into a marketing program?
- Frei: That was done because we got a little tiny bit irritated over the constant haggling over price and going from one source to another, just generally being footballed around. So we decided that it might be a good item to get in and have our own label. As you know there were about five-six partners in there.
- Vercelli: There was Fredson, McCutchen, Geyserville Growers which was a co-op, Frei Brothers, and I think Sink.
- Frei: Right. Walter Sink.
- Vercelli: You formed this co-operating marketing—I don't know if I should use the term co-operating, but it was a marketing organization. You were about 30-40 years ahead of the times.
- Frei: Right.
- Vercelli: That's what we are doing today, wineries getting together, appointing a person—either a broker or a distributor to market their wares. You have Vintage Wines in San Francisco represents about six small wineries. So these individuals we just made mention of, had that concept in mind forty years ago.
- Frei: That's right.
- Vercelli: Did you close down during Prohibition?
- Frei: We closed down, immediately stored it.





- Vercelli: You didn't do what Fred Haigh (Simi Winery) did, he held on to inventory. From Frank DeGeorge today I have in my possession a 702 form, inventory control form from 1927. He tried to hold on. And then Frank Nervo told me that during Prohibition he knew of people—I imagine that he didn't want to confess that it was he—they put large stones in the tanks, they removed the wine and used the large stones to displace the wine, the wine that they had sold. He also mentioned that on top of the tank, the underside of the tank, they would put a 10 or 15 gallon keg right under the bung hole, fill that full of wine but the rest of the tank was full of water. Frank was full of interesting anecdotes.
- Frei: We keep our tanks full right through.
- Vercelli: Then during Prohibition the tanks weren't empty?
- Frei: They were full of wine.
- Vercelli: You kept that wine from 1920 to 1933—what disposition did you make of that wine?
- Frei: [Asks to have tape cut off]
- Vercelli: Andy when did you make wine on the advent of Repeal? The Repeal of the Prohibition took place on December the 6th, 1933. Did you make wine in 1933?
- Frei: If Repeal was in December of 1933 it wouldn't have been legal until 1934, so we went into wine making in the fall of 1934.
- Vercelli: You were legal, you could make wine in '33, but you couldn't sell it until December. I entered the industry in August 22, 1933.
- Frei: We weren't making wine at that time.
- Vercelli: The Italian Swiss Colony made wine, and the Italian Swiss had a lot of grape juice, I recall the grape juice had 700 parts per million of sulfur dioxide and I didn't know how to treat it with peroxide to get rid of the sulfur. So we would blend the high sulfated wines with the new wines in order to make them marketable.
- Frei: We didn't know anything about that, we didn't make grape juice, we made wine.



Vercelli: I assisted in the last batch of 3.2 wine. I could find no record where they made a lot of sacramental wine. They could have made it, there are writings that indicate that they made it. But in talking with people that were associated with it, like Joe Coppa was associated with the winery from 1920 all through the Prohibition era, up until about 1950, maybe a little bit later. He never made reference to the Colony making sacramental wines.

Frei: I'll tell you who did make sacramental wines, it was J.T. Grace.

Vercelli: Yes.

Frei: He had the I. DeTurk plant (3rd Street in Santa Rosa) and right straight through Prohibition he made wine for the Catholic church.

Vercelli: He is perhaps one of the few wineries in Sonoma County that made sacramental wines.

Frei: To my knowledge.

Vercelli: I didn't know that before.

When you talk about the I. DeTurk, he was perhaps the foremost viticulturist of his time. He started the Vintage Commission in 1860 at the time of the Civil War, he had the Viticultural Commission that engaged (Agoston) Haraszthy to go to Hungary to bring in those European varieties.

Frei: That's interesting.

Vercelli: Talking about politicians, does the name Cohn, Julius Cohn....

Frei: Yes it does, he was after getting the grape crop converted into some other purpose.

Vercelli: That's what I understand, he sought to get federal aide to study utilization of grapes. I don't recall, I was a youngster, I think it was from about 1924 to 1928—I remember him passing away, his wife was appointed to serve out his term.

Frei: As a Congresswoman.

Vercelli: One of the earliest Congresswomen in Congress.



What was the size of the Frei Brothers plant prior to your disposition?

Frei: It was in the neighborhood of between 850 to 900,000 gallons.

Vercelli: Would you buy outside grapes or did you grow all your own grapes?

Frei: We bought very muchly so on the outside, but only good grapes.

Vercelli: Roughly about how many acres were in vineyard?

Frei: Close to 500.

Vercelli: Andy do you have any idea who assisted your father in producing or in making the wine. I have a vague recollection of there being a winemaker out there in 1934-35. Do you remember his name?

Frei: Yes, I do, it was Joe Schmidt. He was quite a character.

Vercelli: I remember him, he was well built, I guess he was of German extraction.

Frei: Yes, he was.

Vercelli: Do you remember anything about him?

Frei: He made a good wine for us.

Vercelli: You always had a good reputation.

Frei: He was good. Then after two or three years, he got injured in an accident and he felt he had better not go any further. And Walter got George Rosasco who was our winemaker for 35 years.

Vercelli: George did a good job.

Frei: George did a marvelous job, not only in the winery but in the vineyards, he was very conscientious. Probably thought of the business as his own. George is still in the area, he's retired and we talk.

Vercelli: How old do you think George is?

Frei: I know exactly, he had his 75 birthday last Saturday.





You know he didn't know how to make wine—Walter Frei was the one that taught him from the bottom up.

Vercelli: What education did your dad and Walter have? Were they college graduates?

Frei: My dad was a graduate of the University of California, graduated in Engineering. Walter graduated from the Mark Hopkins Art Institute, right on the spot where the Mark Hopkins Hotel is today.

Vercelli: As an architect?

Frei: As an artist.

Vercelli: Tell me about your mother, what was her maiden name?

Frei: Her maiden name was Moony and they were an old family, a very large family in Petaluma, they were Irish.

There's a combination for you—Irish and Swiss (chuckles).

#### Stop Tape

Vercelli: Andy we were just reminiscing about how you got into the wine industry and the names Harry Caddow, the Wentes, Carl Bundschu and a few others. You started to say of your experiences in taking surveys...what were the objectives of the surveys?

Frei: It was 1937, that was the starting of the Wine Advisory Board, the wine industry advertising program. And Harry Caddow, Leon Adams, Al Morro, and Carl Wente all thought we should go around and find out what the trend was among people regarding use of sour wine, as they so ungently referred to dry wine in those days. The idea of the survey was to find out whether or not people actually knew there was such a thing as dry wine vs. sour wine. So I went around and took surveys primarily for the advertising agency to start drawing conclusions from, who was at that time J. Walter Thompson. I went from one end of the state, from San Diego to Eureka, all the valley towns, and finally wound up in the state of Nevada, Reno running surveys. Asking people on the street, "Would you like to try a glass of dry wine?" And they would look at me in amazement. "Oh, you're talking about white port and muscatel?" (chuckles) "No, far from it, we're talking about a dry wine which is not sweet, it is very palatable and it is very digestive with your meals." With that (surveying) we ascertained that there was a tremendous



space in-between their thoughts regarding sweet and dry wines.

Vercelli: That's interesting, here forty years later, we still have the same problem to a degree.

Frei: That's correct.

End of tape



## **Introduction to Emil Plasberg Oral History**

The Plasberg family was part of the group of San Franciscans that moved full-time to Sonoma County after the devastating 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco. The Plasbergs moved to upper Dry Creek Valley when Mrs. Mary (Reiners) Plasberg inherited her share of her father's (C. A. Reiners) property. They moved into the existing home with Mrs. Plasberg's mother. Her brother George inherited the existing C. A. Reiners Winery (established about 1860) and brother John inherited the remaining land. Charles Robert (C. R.) Plasberg built a winery, as did John Reiners, eventually the property ended up with three wineries. John Reiners went on to become winemaker for the Sonoma County Co-operative in Windsor.

The Plasberg winery was in operation until Prohibition and then the family shipped Zinfandel grapes back east to make ends meet. Robert and Emil reopened the winery after Repeal of Prohibition as the Simrach Winery and operated until 1935 when Emil then opened the Plasberg Liquor Store on Center Street off the Plaza in Healdsburg.





## Emil Plasberg

Interviewed by Joseph Vercelli  
December 7, 1982

Transcription by Gail Ryan, Healdsburg      July, 1993

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Joseph Vercelli: I'm sitting in the living room of an old time friend, Emil Plasberg. Emil and I met back in 1934 when I was working for the Italian Swiss Colony. Emil told me today that he recalls an assignment that was given to me by Enrico Prati, then the manager/superintendent of Italian Swiss Colony, wherein I was sent to clarify some wines at the Plasberg Winery.

Emil can you tell me a little about your family background? Where your father migrated from, where your mother was born, and the like?

Emil Plasberg: My mother (Mary Reiners) was born in San Francisco and my father was born, to the best of my knowledge, in Hanover [Germany]. They never knew one another [before] they met in San Francisco. They went together and got married.

Vercelli: What year did your father migrate to California? Did he migrate to any other part of the United States before he came West?

Plasberg: No. He landed in San Diego first, but he didn't stay there long, maybe a day or so, then boarded a train and came up to San Francisco, because that was where the family was born. How did we get up there? Why my father went to school in the confectionery business and he had often said that he went four years to school and got his diploma and then he had two years as an apprentice and then he got his diploma to work in any good hotel. At that time he thought that he just wanted to see some trades and other parts of the world, so he went over to England. It just happened to be that when he got to England, the town of London, the New Englander Hotel in London needed a confectioner. Today you don't have that anymore you have the head chef and that's all, in those days you had the head chef and the pastry chef because you didn't have the Langendorf wagons cakes and cookies that come from grocery stores, they all had to make their own, and that's why they had to hire a confectionist. My father was



single and the head chef was single and in the kitchen they got to be very good friends. He said that he was very likable and they would go out together in the evenings and one time the chef said, "Why don't we get together and you teach me as much as you can of the confection business and likewise I'll teach you about things to cook?" Although, my father was a pretty good cook them, because he liked to cook in the home with his mother at the stove and was always interested in cooking and baking. So they agreed on that, and between them they could make the confectionery and cook a good sized meal.

- Vercelli: Emil, how old was your father when he migrated to California?
- Plasberg: He came over in about 1880, as close as I can come, it was in around about that time.
- Vercelli: What was your father's full name?
- Plasberg: Charles Robert.
- Vercelli: Did he come from a large family?
- Plasberg: He had two sisters and two brothers.
- Vercelli: And your family consisted of you, a brother—how large was your family?
- Plasberg: Just my brother and myself.
- Vercelli: Just the two boys.
- Vercelli: When were you born?
- Plasberg: I was born in San Francisco.
- Vercelli: How about your brother Robert?
- Plasberg: He was also born in San Francisco.
- Vercelli: When did you migrate into the Dry Creek Valley?
- Plasberg: When the earthquake and fire came in 1906.
- Vercelli: That's very interesting, because that's when the Bacigalupi family, that I mentioned to you before, the Gaddinis they [also] came up. How did he select Healdsburg? It was quite a ways up from San Francisco?





Plasberg: My mother's brother was on the ranch and my grandfather died. My grandmother was on this ranch in Dry Creek Valley that they had. It was Easter Vacation and my mother, brother and I were up on vacation, we were going home that next Thursday and that Tuesday morning was the earthquake. And of course, it was in the papers and all that the town was just in an uproar, and I don't just know how, but my father got a telegram through to mother, "Stay right where you are. The business is burnt up, the house is burnt up." They had a small wagon, in those days they called them spring wagons, a little wagon that they had at the bar, a liquor store, the bartender pulled it by hand, they got one load of things from the house and went out to some park out there—I don't remember which one, I was only six years old at the time. When they got back they [had] called in the militia and declared martial law, and my father wanted to go back and get some more and they wouldn't let him, he told the officer, "But I live here!" And the officer said, "But that's what everybody says!" Well, my father said, "I can prove it, I have paper and letters in my pocket with the address," but he wouldn't let him do it. So everything they had down there was burnt up, except for the one wagon load of things. So he and the bartender, he had a baker friend down there, the baker lost his bakery, he had a horse. They hitched the horse to this spring wagon and drove from San Francisco up to Dry Creek Valley.

Vercelli: And that was the beginning, you never returned to San Francisco?

Plasberg: Not until the 1915 Pan-American Exposition.

Vercelli: When did your dad acquire the property at Dry Creek, at that time?

Plasberg: No. He bought a saloon, in those days they were called saloons. It was a one mile house, it was the corner of Dry Creek Road and [Hwy] 101 going up. He was there about three years.

Vercelli: That was the saloon that Nardi family bought later on?

Plasberg: Yes, he sold it to Nardi.

Vercelli: Today I lived just a few hundred yards [from there] and have those 17 acres of land just about 300 yards up from your Dad's saloon—going out Dry Creek.





- Plasberg: That's where you had the winery.
- Vercelli: That's right. Very interesting.
- Plasberg: How we got on the ranch, my grandmother was getting older and she had three children that were left, two brothers and my mother. So they divided the ranch into three shares and my grandmother was alive then and she wanted to live with my mother. The house we had out there was on the part she wanted to keep herself, so the two brothers took the winery they had there, the original winery my grandfather had built and the other brother took a lot of land next to that and we kept, my mother got the site where the houses were.
- Vercelli: You make reference to your grandfather having a winery? Do you have any idea when he started that winery, what year? Did he have a name, or was it just know as the Plasberg Winery?
- Plasberg: No, at that time was known as C. A. Reiners, Charles Albert Reiners was his name.
- Vercelli: Now, you're a descent of the Reiners that were associated with the Sonoma County Co-op?
- Plasberg: Yes.
- Vercelli: What was his name? He lived in that beautiful little house in Healdsburg on the corner?
- Plasberg: John Reiners.
- Vercelli: I knew John Reiners. How were you related to John Reiners?
- Plasberg: He was my mother's brother, I was his nephew.
- Vercelli: Very interesting.
- Getting back to your grandfather, have you any idea to the time his started his winery?
- Plasberg: I would say it was—well, somewheres around 1860. He formally had the Eureka Soda Works in San Francisco. He sold that off and wanted to go a farming, I don't know how he got started on Healdsburg, something attracted him and that's when he brought the family up.
- Vercelli: How large a plot of land did you have with the winery? After the division?



- Plasberg: We had a little over 50 acres, and my father built a winery there in 1911, and John Reiners built a winery on his in 1911 also, and the other son, George, kept the old winery.
- Vercelli: So basically, you had three wineries on one piece of property—your grandfather's property. Originally, how large was his property? It was divided up three ways, 50 acres on one parcel of land, what did George and John have on their—what was it over all?
- Plasberg: I think it was 160 acres altogether. They have just built this new house on it, although it sold. They got 15 or 16 acres more than my mother did, because my mother got the big house.
- Vercelli: The house is still standing today?
- Plasberg: Yes.
- Vercelli: One of the Teldeschi boys is living in that house and owns the property today?
- Plasberg: No, the Teldeschi boy is living in the house they originally had before they built the new house. No one lived in the new house except for grandmother and my father and mother. Then after my father passed away, my mother gave it to my brother and when he passed away and it went to his daughter and his wife.
- Vercelli: Are they living in the house today?
- Plasberg: No.
- Vercelli: Did they sell the property?
- Plasberg: I understand that they did. The daughter took up school teaching and she is down in—
- Vercelli: —what is her name?
- Plasberg: Her name is Elaine. She's teaching college down north of Burbank, down in Los Angeles. The second wife that he left this to, she was killed in an automobile accident.
- Vercelli: What type of grapes were grown on the place? Can you recall the variety?





Plasberg: Yes, the biggest portion of them I would say, 90% was Zinfandel, well say 85%, then there were about three or four acres of Petite Sirah, then about an acre of Grenache grapes, then we also handled about two acres of Burger grapes—you never hear of anymore.

Vercelli: That's very true.

How did you sell your wine in those days?

Plasberg: Well, we sold to the larger wineries. At one time they sold to Italian Swiss Colony, then there was the winery in Healdsburg, the French American Winery, there was a man there by the name of Bill Hopland, he was quite friendly with the family.

Vercelli: Do you have any idea as to the periods of time? The reason I ask you that, is that the French American, George de Latour of Beaulieu Vineyards was working in the French American Wine Company and then went to Rutherford. I had heard that story, but I have never heard it from anyone of authority. Do you recall hearing of a de Latour at the French American Wine Company? My source of information was Paul DeHay, of Cloverdale. Paul told me that the de Latour family got their start, George de Latour, got their start at the French American Wine Company, which was at the corner where the Steven's Lumber yard used to be (Hudson and Front Streets)—

Plasberg: Yes.

Vercelli: That was the Prima Vista Wine Company in 1933. A fellow by the name of Jaffe bought that winery.

Plasberg: Yes, I've heard that name. Well, this Bill Hopland was the manager of the winery. He didn't own it. He was the winemaker and the manager.

Vercelli: You made wine until when? You made reference of going back to San Francisco for the Expo in 1915. Did the family move there?

Plasberg: No, we didn't move there, we just went down to take in the Exposition, we still lived in Healdsburg.

Vercelli: Did you operate the winery up until Prohibition time?

Plasberg: Yes, we did.





- Vercelli: What did you do during Prohibition?
- Plasberg: We were allowed to make 200 gallons per family, we made our quota and in those days we shipped grapes back East.
- Vercelli: So the winery was closed during Prohibition?
- Plasberg: Yes.
- Vercelli: What was the size of the winery, capacity—do you recall?
- Plasberg: About 26,000 gallons.
- Vercelli: It was a fair sized winery.
- So you closed down in 1919—
- Plasberg: Well, we had to, there was nothing else to do.
- Vercelli: Well, Fred Haigh (of Simi Winery) made wine for a couple of years during that time, and he kept his wine. I remember the wine coming to Asti (Italian Swiss Colony), but it had all spoiled.
- When did you open up, 1934?
- Plasberg: It was in the year the Volstead Act was repealed, 1933.
- Vercelli: But being that it was so late in the year, did you make wine in 1933 or did you wait until 1934? It was December 6th when the Volstead Act was repealed. Some people, like Italian Swiss, made grape juice and then they converted it into wine after [Repeal].
- Plasberg: I think we made wine in the Fall of 1933.
- Vercelli: How long did you operate after Prohibition?
- Plasberg: Until about 1935, when I opened a liquor store in Healdsburg.
- Vercelli: So basically, you operated three vintages after Repeal—33-34-35?
- Plasberg: Yes.
- Vercelli: Do you remember any other wineries in the vicinity? You mentioned French American Wine Company and you mentioned the Reiners, which is very helpful to me. Did your



father have a trade name, or did the Reiners have a trade name? Like the Gaddinis had the name Laurel Springs Winery, because they had some laurel trees and they named the winery after the trees. Did you have some type of trade name?

Plasberg: No, we didn't. I guess, my father thought we weren't large enough to put on a trade name or anything.

Vercelli: Can you bring to mind any of your neighbors, do you remember the Healdsburg Wine Company that come in a little bit later with the Massonis?

Plasberg: Yes.

Vercelli: The Bellis?

Plasberg: Yes. And then there was one out there on the Gaddini Ranch, the Massonis, I think they built that.

Vercelli: Yes, then they moved over from the Gaddini Ranch over into Dry Creek, that was at the foot of Chiquita Road.

Plasberg: A little north of the foot of that Chiquita Road. It was almost to the foot of the Rodgers Grade that came down there. Well, on one side they called it Galloway Hill because the Galloways lived on that side, and on this side it was the Rodgers Grade.

Vercelli: Do you remember anything about the Simi Winery, Montepulciano?

Plasberg: A small amount. I wasn't over there too many times, but I recall when they built a big water reservoir up on top of the hill. I was just a kid going to school, about seven years old. In those days, they had to haul gravel with four horse teams. In the morning I would see the teams going by, hauling gravel.

Vercelli: Do you know that [reservoir] was never filled up? It leaked! John Bosio, that worked for Isabelle Simi Haigh, told me that that was their source of water, but it never held, it had cracks in it from the start. And at that time, a fellow by the name of Perelli-Minetti (Julio) was their consultant. Do you remember that name?

Plasberg: Yes, very well, Perelli-Minetti.

Vercelli: Well, that's a confirmation of what I've heard from other people in the area.



Do you remember the Fredsons?

Plasberg: Yes. I remember Chris Fredson very well.

Vercelli: Do you remember him from where they have their present [location] north of Healdsburg, or do you remember him from having a winery down by the underpass, down by Sotoyome School?

Plasberg: No, I remember when he had the winery going up by Geyserville.

Vercelli: The first Fredson Winery was down right at the underpass, below Foppiano's, right where Sotoyome School was.

Can you think of the name of any other wineries in the vicinity of Dry Creek?

Plasberg: Well, let's see, north of us there was the old Patronack Winery—

Vercelli: Patronack, I've heard that name before. What do you know of the Patronack Winery?

Plasberg: I never knew the Patronack family, although I heard of them often. Two brothers, the Guivera brothers, they have the Patronack Winery. They made wine there and they bought all the wine we made one year.

Vercelli: Guivera brothers—this is the first time I heard that we had Italians out in Dry Creek—other than the Massonis. [chuckles]

Plasberg: The Patronack Winery was as you go up towards Skaggs Springs after the road from Geyserville [Canyon Road], you go up several hundred yards then you cross Dry Creek bridge and you almost end the road up there.

Vercelli: Does the name Emil Scoli mean anything to you?

Plasberg: Yes. I knew Emil Scoli very well.

Vercelli: He had a winery out at the end of Wine Creek Road.

Plasberg: Wine Creek Road.

Vercelli: They had a winery out there before Prohibition?





- Plasberg: Yes, I think they made some wine.
- Vercelli: I will talk to Emil before long.
- Plasberg: I think they had wine, the old man Scoli.
- Vercelli: Do you remember the old man?
- Plasberg: Oh yes, he and father were great friends. When he had the Mile House in later years, the Nardi House, he always stopped in there. They were good friends.
- Vercelli: Do you have any pictures or correspondence about your winery? Any legal documents, any registers laying around anywhere?
- Plasberg: No, I haven't run across them.
- Vercelli: If you do come across them would you let me know, I'd like to take photostats of them.
- Plasberg: I don't—you see, that was before Prohibition time and then my father passed away.
- Vercelli: When did your father pass away? I met your father and mother.
- Plasberg: Yes, on that night you came out here to clarify that wine. He passed away in 1945.
- Vercelli: That was ten years after I had been out there.
- Plasberg: My mother passed away in 1960.
- Vercelli: If you think of something interesting in the future, jot it down on a piece of paper and give me a call. You have been a tremendous help bringing the Reiners into the picture.
- Oh, one more—Charlie Yoakim?
- Plasberg: Yes. I remember Charlie Yoakim.
- Vercelli: Do you remember Charlie Yoakim's father or his family? Charlie, was he—I guess he could have been your age?
- Plasberg: Yes.
- Vercelli: He had a winery out there, Yoakim Bridge.



Plasberg: Yoakim Winery. That's a winery up there—it's been so long since I've thought of it. They were on the east side of Dry Creek and Patronack was on the west side.

Vercelli: Do you remember anything about the Yoakim Winery? It's size, what they made—

Plasberg: No. I don't think that after Prohibition they started the winery again.

Vercelli: I think one year. I think they started in 1933 or 34, because then they were part of John Reiners' Co-op. They joined the Sonoma County Co-op, John Reiners was the winemaker for the Co-op.

Plasberg: It was in Windsor, the Windsor Co-op.

Vercelli: That's correct.

Well I guess that's enough for today.

[Pause, turned recorder off]

Emil, you started to tell me about Jack [John] Auradou you had an afterthought.

Plasberg: Well, Jack Auradou's winery was just about 100 yards this side of the old Dry Creek Store out there. Years ago it was a packing store and some people by the name of Boise had it and finally Lloyd Goodyear, had a shore out in Alexander Valley, he bought the place. There was a little hill going down and the Jack Auradou Winery was at the foot of the hill. I don't know just what the size was, his was a fair size winery, I would roughly guess it was 100,000 gallons of cooperage.

Vercelli: That's a good size operation.

And Jack Auradou married a Gaddini girl (Clara)?

Plasberg: Yes, I'm positive of that.

Vercelli: Another Gaddini girl (Olive) was married to a Bacigalupi. That's the lady I interviewed that is 93 years old. She was a Gaddini girl, she was reared in San Francisco and when the earthquake came along, she told me the story how they came up the Redwood Highway. How they were met, their father wanted them to get an education so he had sent them to private schools in San Francisco, the Gaddini girls. Mrs.



Olive Bacigalupi mentioned something about Jack Auradou—  
Clem—

Plasberg: Clem's father.

Vercelli: Jack Auradou was Clem's father?

Plasberg: Yes. His wife, I knew her well, Jack's wife was Clem's  
mother, Clara Gaddini Auradou.

End of tape.





## A Personal Recollection about George Rosasco and Events Surrounding the Oral History Interview.

by William Heintz

I met with George Rosasco and his wife (whose first name I never obtained because it seemed inappropriate to do so) to discuss the history of the Frei Brothers Winery.

The interview began rather strangely because Rosasco wanted to know immediately how I had traced Walter Frei's daughter, Mrs. Ben Benson.

Usually I begin interviews with questions about the family of the person being interviewed, (usually a man long associated with the wine industry). Then I ask his wife her name, especially her maiden name and local origins.

Rosasco seemed highly suspicious of me, especially that I knew the Rued family. (They were associated with Andrew Frei in the early years of the Frei Winery.) This is not an unusual circumstance when strangers meet, especially one accompanied by a tape recorder.

Rosasco was surprisingly forthcoming for the interview except when it came to some aspects of the operations at the Frei Winery during Prohibition. He did not go to work for Freis until 1938 but he certainly knew of the arrests at the winery during Prohibition for producing wine without permits. This did not involve the Frei family. Rosasco was purposefully vague about this portion of the winery's history.

One of the more delightful portions of the interview involves Rosasco having a dispute with Julio Gallo when he came to buy wine for the Gallo Winery. Julio wanted a certain 20,000 gallon tank of red wine, Rosasco wanted to sell him the contents of another tank.

It turned into an angry dispute between "two little hot wops" as Rosasco characterized it and Gallos decided to purchase no more Frei Brothers wine. Considering that Rosasco could have lost his position, he was rather bold.

Ironically, Gallos purchased the Frei Winery eventually. And they have added a large amount of Dry Creek Valley vineyards to their holdings in recent years. Julio and Ernest may have been singularly impressed with the red wine they did purchase from Rosasco in 1939.



There is considerable discussion in the interview about an architectural feature called "channel rustic." A major reason for the meeting with Rosasco was to seek his knowledge on the age of the Frei Winery structures.

One building, located now in the very center of the complex, was built in 1885 by Charles Dunz (often spelled Duntz). The Gallo/Frei Winery dates back to that historic year and even the original portion of the winery is intact.



**George Rosasco**

Frei Brothers Winery, Dry Creek Valley, Healdsburg

Interviewed by William Heintz  
114 Oxford Court, Santa Rosa, California  
May 18, 1979

Transcription by Gail Ryan, Healdsburg

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George Rosasco: How did you get in contact with Walt's daughter?

William Heintz: Emily Rued, do you know her, the Rued family—

Rosasco: In Healdsburg? Yes. They are indirectly related aren't they?

Heintz: That's right. In the 1890's Andrew Frei and Rued were partners in the winery. I don't understand the arrangement they had, but they were partners. And then Frei bought him out.

[Mrs. Rosasco arrives]

Andrew Frei bought Rued out in 1900. So I looked through the telephone book [to ask the Rued family how to locate Walter's daughter].

Rosasco: That must have been Paul Rued's grandfather.

Heintz: It probably was. Emily Rued said this man I was talking about (I had sent her some newspaper clippings) was a grand-uncle. He was her father's uncle. I knew they were related somehow, and she said the person to talk with was Walter's daughter, who lives in San Francisco, Mrs. Ben Benson.

Rosasco: I couldn't figure out how you got in touch with her.

Heintz: Sometimes it is amazing that you can track people down.

Rosasco: After [your call] I started thinking that there was some connection in the background with the Rueds.

Heintz: Yes, they have told me and I have it in my minutes, but I can't remember just off hand.





I'd like a little bit of your own background. Were you born in Sonoma County?

Rosasco: Yes, I was born right in Healdsburg.

Mrs. Rosasco: So were your mother and father [born in California], don't forget.

Heintz: What was your father name?

Rosasco: George.

Heintz: George also?

Rosasco: Yes.

Heintz: And he was born here?

Rosasco: Born in San Francisco, I think. Because when my grandfather came over [he settled in San Francisco]. [My father] was a San Francisco boy, he was a gardener all his life.

Heintz: The name Rosasco, is it Italian?

Rosasco: Yes. There's a town in Italy named Rosasco. It's a funny thing, you take in this town here, the Foppianos—there are three families of Foppianos in Healdsburg and none of them are related. They are all from the same town, but none of them are related.

Heintz: I know Louie [Foppiano] and the winery people.

Rosasco: Well, Louie is my third cousin. [Laughs]

Heintz: Do you have any idea when your father immigrated to this country?

Rosasco: I don't know, my daughter-in-law is writing a family tree of the Rosasco family and is going way back to Italy. There's my grandfather's brother that's over there. And she's trying to take all that over there.

Heintz: What was your mother's name?

Rosasco: Born, B-o-r-n. She was Irish. [laughs]

Heintz: What was her first name?



- Rosasco: Mary, Mary Born.
- Heintz: How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- Rosasco: Let's see, two have passed away and I have one sister yet and a brother.
- Heintz: How were they—from oldest to youngest? I like to know the names of the family.
- Rosasco: My sister's the oldest and she's in Ukiah.
- Heintz: Her first name?
- Rosasco: Sarah.
- Heintz: She's the oldest.
- Rosasco: And I'm next. Then two years later, my sister, Elizabeth. Then ten years later, Josephine, she only lived to be two years old and she passed away.
- Heintz: When did your father move to Healdsburg or Dry Creek?
- Rosasco: We didn't live in Dry Creek, on Magnolia Drive.
- Heintz: So your father didn't live in Dry Creek.
- Rosasco: No. Now they had a winery there on Magnolia Drive, but they never operated it when I was there. One guy rented it one year but couldn't sell the wine. I never did saw them operate, tanks were there and everything.
- Heintz: Where was this?
- Rosasco: On Magnolia Drive, better known as "Tight-wad Lane".
- Heintz: Why was that?
- Rosasco: [Laughs] I don't know, there were a bunch of wops around there and they nicknamed it "Tight-wad Lane".
- Heintz: They kept their money, I see.
- You don't think he [father] ever operated it himself, the Rosasco Winery?
- Rosasco: My father didn't but my grandfather did.



Heintz: I wonder how early that was?

Rosasco: That's going way back. I'm seventy-two, so—

Heintz: I was going to ask you when you were born.

Rosasco: 1907.

Heintz: Do you have a birth date, month?

Rosasco: August 6th.

Heintz: You went to school in Healdsburg?

Rosasco: I went to school in Healdsburg until I was in the fifth grade. Then my father bought a ranch down by where the old highway used to go, the underpass there—I went there, that's Eastside Road. [Old Redwood Highway and Eastside, about 3 miles north of Windsor and about 4 miles south of Healdsburg]. About a mile down there we had a ranch.

Heintz: You grew up there, in your teen years?

Rosasco: Yes.

Heintz: What did you do in your twenties?

Rosasco: I was in Hopland. I moved to Hopland, I lived 15 years there. Bought a ranch in Hopland and retained that ranch [on Eastside] and bought a ranch in Hopland.

Heintz: Why did you happen to go to work for the Freis?

Rosasco: You remember the Depression?

Heintz: I was born in it, I was told alot about it.

Rosasco: It was really rough times, my father died when I was—I wasn't quite 21 when he passed away. When did he get killed? He got his leg broken in a spraying machine there in Hopland. Five days later he died of gangrene. And he was heavily in debt. That was pushed onto me. I was the oldest boy, my brother was only ten. So I had to grow up the hard way.

Heintz: Did you lose your ranch?

Rosasco: Yes, had to give it back to California Lands. I worked a couple years around there, I had a friend up there that had





a hay press and I had a tractor and a truck. I went out baling hay, I baled hay for about 2¢.

I had a friend, Walter Sink, he knew Frei and that's how he got in contact with me.

Heintz: The Sink Winery operated for quite a few years, didn't it?

Rosasco: Yes.

Heintz: The Sinks go back quite a ways—W. B. Sink, Colonel Sink.

What year did you go to work for the Freis?

Rosasco: 1938. July 1938.

Heintz: Did you move to the ranch? As the foreman did you move to the little house on the property?

Rosasco: There was that house and a bunkhouse.

Heintz: So you moved there.

Rosasco: Yes.

Heintz: And you worked for them from 1938 to what years?

Rosasco: I quit in 1975.

Heintz: Were you foreman all those years?

Rosasco: Manager. I run it just like my own ranch. I never had to ask any of them anything. The only time I had to ask them, it was to spend money to buy a tractor. As far as running the ranch, they had no say to any of the men on the ranch. They see something going on the ranch they didn't like they'd report to me, and I would see to it. I told them that's the way it was. There were two brothers, see, Louie and Walt, the first time I met them they were fighting like cats and dogs. The American Box Company come in one day — Andy [Frei] had a hell of a temper—he said, "God damn you, I told you I would order it when we're ready for it. Don't come around bothering us." I went in later, and oh hell no. I said, "I don't think I'm going to get along with you guys, I have a quick temper, too. If ever you guys want to give orders, it's up to you if you want something done to the winery, some improvement— I said, "Both of you come up together don't have the other guy come up and say "Who told you to do



that? I don't want it done that way!" With partnerships you get that, but we never had one cross word.

Heintz: Because you set the rules in the beginning.

Rosasco: I set it down. I told them. One time I fired two of the key men there. They had been on it 15 years at Frei Brothers, they said, "You shouldn't be doing that." I told them, "I'll tell you one thing, they think they own the damn ranch, if you want them to run ranch, I'll go back to Hopland where I came from." [laughs]

Heintz: In the Fall of 1938, did you have a crush?

Rosasco: We just crushed our own grapes.

Heintz: Had the winery opened right after Prohibition? Did anybody ever tell you?

Rosasco: Yes. They took it over from Sargenti. I guess, the year after Repeal.

Heintz: 1934.

Rosasco: Then the guy, Joe Schmidt run it. He run it 5 years, something like that, he had an accident on the ranch.

Heintz: Was the winery totally empty (at Repeal)?

Rosasco: I never went back that far. I don't know anything about that. I know they dumped some wine, I know that. They just opened the bungs and let it go down the creek.

Heintz: Was it spoiled?

Rosasco: I don't know. It was none of my business. I've seen pictures of it, it looked like the whole damn winery was afloat inside [chuckles].

Heintz: Mrs. Benson said, it killed trees and everything all down from the winery, from so much acid.

Rosasco: Oh, yeah. A lot of people dumped wine. The government wanted to tax every year and you couldn't afford it. You couldn't sell it, you were sitting with a tank full and you had to take care of it, and you didn't know when Repeal was coming in. Hell, they figured they wouldn't pay it [tax]. I don't know why they couldn't have made alcohol or something out of it.



- Heintz: — Brandy out of it. But you need a distillery, which cost a lot.
- Rosasco: The biggest distillery at that time around that I know off was down by Sausalito, Mason Distillery. They used to sell a lot of wine.
- Heintz: When you moved into the winery in July, did you make the wine too? Or did they have someone that made the wine?
- Rosasco: The first year I didn't know nothing about that — He was the wine maker for Grace Brothers. You know, the Grace Brothers had a winery and a brewery at the same time. Well, they were sweet wine makers and I think they quit making sweet wine, so he retired. Joe Grace and Walt were good friends and he come up that year and helped them make wine. Showed them how to rack it.
- Heintz: So the first year you helped make wine was 1938.
- Rosasco: Oh yes.
- Heintz: How much did you make? Did it fill the winery?
- Rosasco: Oh, gosh no. I forget the size of the wine that year—600 tons.
- Heintz: How about in 1939—40—41?
- Rosasco: We made wine every year. Then finally we started buying on the outside.
- Heintz: When did you start buying on the outside, when did you go beyond your own vineyards?
- Rosasco: It must have been between — I kept a set of books that had all about the winery information and when Gallo bought the winery. Last time I was out there, I wanted a couple certain pages and they had dumped them all. I was damn mad.
- Heintz: Do you think that you started before the War started buying from other people in the valley? Or did you just crush your own grapes on the ranch?
- Rosasco: The War started—
- Heintz: Fall of 1941, December.





- Rosasco: Walt was buried on D-Day.
- Heintz: In 1944? D-Day invasion was in 1944.
- Rosasco: That's right. June 6th, I remember that day, he was buried in Piedmont. I remember coming back and heard it on the radio, D-Day, D-Day. I didn't know what the hell that was. Later on when I got home, I found out it was the invasion of Normandy Beach.
- Heintz: What was the first year you sold to Gallos?
- Rosasco: The first year I was there, in 1938?
- Heintz: In '38 you sold to Gallos? Oh, you let it ferment and stored it—
- Rosasco: No, no. I didn't make that wine, that wine was made the year before. They bought wine so we could crush. The winery was full. I remember when Julio — that's when Julio and I got into it, we were two little hot wops. [laughs] I always kid him about that, "Who's buying this wine." I don't remember that but I do, you made me damn mad." I wanted them to take Tank 1 at the winery, its 20,000 gallons, but then they didn't buy anymore wine until 1948.
- Heintz: They only bought one year?
- Rosasco: Yes, that one year.
- Heintz: Then in 1948. Who did you sell to between 1938 and 1948?
- Rosasco: Well that's a big deal. He had a place down in the valley [Central], Arakelian Winery.
- Heintz: Was that the winery or was Arakelian the name of the town?
- Rosasco: It was in Merced, that was the name of the winery, Arakelian They had a pretty good size winery down there. I think they took that winery and made a co-op out of it. I was never in the winery.
- Heintz: Did you say that most of the years you sold it to Arakelian?
- Rosasco: No. That was the first guy I remember we sold to. Then all the wineries got together — Geyserville Growers, the tin winery-Fredson they all got together and were going to finish the wine at this place in Geyserville. The first God



damn year, to sell wine you had to have sweet wine to go with it—

Heintz: So you all went together to make wine?

Rosasco: They were trading two gallons of dry wine off for one gallon of sweet. The first thing that went over big, after Repeal, was the sweet wine — Muscatel — dry wine was out with the old Italians. Fredson stayed one year and he pulled out. I think, Tay Sink stayed two years and he pulled out. Freis stayed three years and they pulled out. The next year or two Geyserville Growers folded up too. And that was the end of that deal. [Northern Sonoma Wines]

Later on all the alcohol — whiskey people started buying wineries. You remember that?

Heintz: Oh, that's right.

Rosasco: They went around and bought all the wineries up all right. Well, what were some of their names — Martini [& Pratti], they also bought the Grace Brothers Winery—

Heintz: Italian Swiss Colony?

Rosasco: No, no. Italian Swiss Colony was something else. National Distillers was up at Italian Swiss.

Heintz: Martini, I don't know who he made wines for, Prati made wines for ...his father.

Did they buy some of the Frei's wine?

Rosasco: Oh, yes. They were under contract to them for three or four years.

Heintz: Which winery did you take it to?

Rosasco: Martini's winery down here...

Heintz: Oh, the Martini & Prati [Graton/Vinehill area]. Did they buy it back from them or something?

Rosasco: They finally bought it back when their boys sold out later. The people only had it about four years. Finally they give them back. I think National Distillers held on longer than the rest of them. Then they finally went co-op. I don't know what kind of set-up they've got now. Now about all the wine



they make up there is distilled [port], the biggest part of the wine is shipped down below and finished there.

Heintz: Since 1948 all of Frei's production goes to Gallo? How much wine can you make in a year? About 250,000 gallons?

Rosasco: We run just about that. Along around there, sometimes it would run a little higher. A lot of times, we had to rent out too, you know. We would rent, a place in Geyserville we used to rent had a small winery, it's torn down now.

Heintz: Feldmeyer, Stan Feldmeyer? Meyer Winery? Mazzoni?

Rosasco: It wasn't Mazzoni. It was a little winery that was—

Heintz: It was probably built of wood?

Rosasco: No, part of it was concrete.

Heintz: When did Fredson move to Dry Creek? Has that been within the past ten-fifteen years?

Rosasco: When they put the freeway [Highway 101] in, the freeway went right through the middle of his winery.

Heintz: I know he got rid of it.

Rosasco: So he bought that old winery.

Heintz: What was it called, the winery Fredson bought?

Rosasco: Massoni and Belli.

Heintz: Is that different—

Rosasco: Now, Belli later he went to work down in Windsor and him and the guy up at Colony Winery just traded jobs. One went in the winery and the other one went back to making grapes. It was the silliest thing.

Heintz: In 1937, there was a little winery in Dry Creek called the Belli Winery. Now was that different than "Massoni & Belli"?

Rosasco: No, that was the same winery, they just went together.

Heintz: Do you have any idea when that winery was built, the old tin winery?





- Rosasco: Ernie [Ernest] Gaddini used to run that winery. He—the man that used to own the ranch is dead now, Jack Auradou, his wife [Clara] was a Gaddini and they owned that piece of property there, they owned down to the bottom and they just finally sold it off, sold the winery off. That's before my time. But I can remember by father and Gaddini were buddies and all that, he [dad] never had nothing to do with wine or anything.
- Heintz: Was it mostly red wines you made at Frei Brothers? Did they have some whites too?
- Rosasco: Oh, yes, we had whites too.
- Heintz: What percentage did you have?
- Rosasco: Oh, I would say about 30% white or less. It varied. Whatever the supply and demand was, he wanted more of that. One year, I remember they got all the white they could get, they got half whites and half black picked, but they wanted all the white they could use. It's supply and demand, it varied that way.
- Heintz: Do you have any idea when the Sargentis started running [the winery]—did they lease it from Freis after Prohibition started?
- Rosasco: I never did know that. I don't know how many years they were on the ranch. They were both long gone, both over in Napa County when I came there.
- Heintz: Somebody told me that Sargenti's made Sacramental wine for the church.
- Rosasco: They could have at first, for awhile. I don't remember.
- Heintz: Do you remember Charlie Sargenti being arrested for selling wine?
- Rosasco: I heard about it, but I couldn't say a thing. It's hearsay.
- Heintz: Someone told me Sargentis used to ship wine all over the United States, so they must of had a Sacramental Permit. Because if he didn't have a Sacramental Permit and was shipping it all over the United States maybe he was bootlegging it all over.
- Rosasco: No, I don't think he was doing that because you couldn't do that freely.



- Heintz: Oh really?
- Rosasco: They'd pick you up. The only way you had to transfer wine in those days was with puncheons with horses. The first year I went to work for Frei's and for five years there, we worked that whole ranch with mules. You've been out in the ranch haven't you?
- Heintz: No tractors?
- Rosasco: Hell no, I didn't know what a tractor looked like. [chuckles] I had tractors in Hopland, but they didn't have tractors down there.
- Heintz: They were fairly wealthy, couldn't they have bought anything they wanted, if they wanted tractors?
- Rosasco: No, they couldn't use them. That piece is an awful wet piece of ground. You got wet spots and dry spots, the horses could work in there. Then they took them, in the summer time, and hauled apples [at the Sebastopol ranch]. We had six mules and two horses. We kept the horses up there, they never took the horses down to the ranch, but they'd take the six mules down there and they'd haul all the apples out of the field. Or if they didn't do that, they had a big old Frangel truck, remember the old Frangels? And they would park it in the middle of the field somewhere and they would come up with wagons and load the big one and take it out and load it again.
- Heintz: That's interesting.
- Of the old winery buildings, there was one part of the winery that was the oldest part.
- Rosasco: Yes.
- Heintz: It was the little center part?
- Rosasco: The gabled part, it was made out of straight boards, the other was made out of channel rustic.
- Heintz: Channel rustic?
- Rosasco: That is where rustic goes this way and you can see it concave in fourths.



- Heintz: The little older section, it's a straight wood board, its about 69 feet long or 70 feet long by about 30 something?
- Rosasco: Thirty-two feet.
- Heintz: That's the oldest section.
- Rosasco: Yes.
- Heintz: Do you remember Walter or Louie or then Andy saying—I mean any of them saying that this was on the place when my grandfather bought it?
- Rosasco: Yes, that place was on the winery when they bought it. That winery was on the place. They bought it from, now don't ask me his name. I forgot it. I think he was a Swiss-German, too.
- Heintz: Well Andrew Frei came up here in the 1880's from San Francisco. He didn't move here, as you remember, the old man, he manufactured furniture. Very nice furniture. You've got a piece of his furniture?
- Rosasco: [Chuckles] That's it, that's one of them.
- Heintz: That's a beautiful cabinet.
- Rosasco: Marble top.
- Heintz: Beautiful piece.
- Rosasco: Do you know where his furniture factory was?
- Heintz: King Street?
- Rosasco: You know where the Oakland Bay Bridge is? Where the piers are up on the hillsides, that's just where the factory was, sitting right there.
- Heintz: It's a beautiful piece of furniture.
- Rosasco: Let me show you something else like that. [gets a picture] He had 42 work tables in his furniture factory and all with wooden screws on both ends. And one so you could press a whole table top together right on top of the work bench and the other was an ordinary wooden vise.
- Heintz: I want to go back to what you can remember about the oldest part of the winery. Andrew Frei, I went through the county





records, through the deeds. In December 1890, he bought that place.

Rosasco: That was the grandfather. He bought both ranches at the same time. He bought that one there and the one in Sebastopol the same year.

Heintz: The name he bought that from was called Charlie Dunz.

Rosasco: Dunz. That rings a bell., yes.

Heintz: He was a Swiss. He was quite elderly and he had gout, I remember seeing it in the newspaper, and he had a winery, the winery was founded in 1885 and started making wine. So that winery, the original piece of it goes back to Charlie Dunz.

Rosasco: Yes, because when they bought it that piece of the winery was already there. When you get up in the attic today, you can tell—it had a ventilator up on top. We took the ventilator off, it went the full length just like those old time sheds with angle boards, you know for ventilation. We took it all off and put a whirly bird in there for ventilation.

Heintz: You say one of the reasons you can tell the difference between the old section and the pieces added on afterward were they were made of channel rustic?

Rosasco: Yes. The other two gables were channel rustic.

Heintz: The gables?

Rosasco: Yes, there are three gables on the roof. Two on the north side.

Now you won't believe that road—you've been to Frei's?

Heintz: Yes.

Rosasco: That road runs north and south. You wouldn't believe it would you.

Heintz: No, its very confusing.

Rosasco: Alright, the road going to the winery is only ten degrees off of due north. That's how confusing that valley is.

Heintz: It lays very strange.



So you think you remember Louie Frei or Walter saying this is the old part and you even think the name Dunz rings a bell.

Rosasco: Yes.

Heintz: Did you ever see anything written about that or just that someone told you about it?

Rosasco: I just heard people, old timers around there talk about it.

Heintz: You were around when Louie was here, Louie and Walter. Walter died in '44.

Rosasco: Walter died in '44.

Heintz: When did Louie die?

Rosasco: He died in '60 and his wife died in '65.

Heintz: Did Louie ever tell you which parts had been added on? Did he ever say to you, "In 1940 we built this section and added it on to the winery"?

Rosasco: Well, that I don't know, if he added them both on or just one of them on. I don't know.

Heintz: One of the things I'm confused about is you use a word, a phrase called "Channel rustic". That's a design, a way of laying the wood?

Rosasco: No, channel rustic is like T&G [tongue and groove], it goes under like this. You know all of the old-time buildings, houses, everything, was made out of channel rustic. You can get 4" channel rustic, you can get 6", 8". I think 8" is the highest. I don't believe they made 10" channel rustic. All the old barns, good barns, sheep barns were built with it.

Heintz: Did Frei's ever think of bottling?

Rosasco: Well there was one time when they all got together. That's the only time, by themselves, no.

Heintz: Did they bottle that year, when they got together, that year when Sink and all of them [got together]?

Rosasco: Oh yes. They weren't put in fifths, they were putting them in gallons.



- Heintz: Did they label it?
- Rosasco: Oh yeah, they had a label for it.
- Heintz: What did they look like?
- Rosasco: Don't ask me [laughs] I'll tell you who would know. It's—they're out of the wine business. See Bob Meyers [see Robert Meyers Interview-Oral History Series, Louise Davis] is the big shot, Harry [Meyers, father] is a big shot with Geyserville Growers and Bob [Meyers], he's with Geyser Peak now.
- Heintz: So they actually had a label for a couple of years there. It wasn't called Frei?
- Rosasco: No. I don't know what the hell they called it.
- Heintz: Did they sell very much of it?
- Rosasco: Hell no. As I said they traded. Well whatever they had in red wine they traded half of that. They only got half as much in sweet wine. So they didn't sell very much red wine, I know.
- Heintz: How come Walter or Louie never stayed, lived, or built a house on the Dry Creek property? Why live over in Sebastopol? Aren't they interested in the winery?
- Rosasco: I don't know.
- Heintz: You expect a guy owns a winery that he wants to make wine.
- Rosasco: They weren't all that interested. They had a nice operation but they weren't much interested, neither one.
- Heintz: Their father had a lot of money, the old man was quite wealthy.
- Rosasco: The old, old man [Andrew Frei].
- Heintz: They were raised so they were, sort of genteel.
- Rosasco: There was no Andrew Frei [when I worked there]. Louie was the other brother, Louie's boy is named Andy, but there wasn't an Andrew Frei.
- Heintz: Yes, he died long before.





- Rosasco: I think he got electrocuted or something on the ranch down there, I think he was an electrician.
- Heintz: I know, he died in 1918.
- Rosasco: That was long before my time, I know the young Andy, he's called Andy the III, on his legal papers.
- Heintz: I could never understand if they bought a winery, why didn't they want to live on the land and make wine. It's always kind of an ego trip.
- Rosasco: Walter's house is right there behind the ranch. Have you ever been to the other ranch?
- Heintz: No.
- Rosasco: Well, he's right behind the ranch so he had a nice house down there, and Louie had a nice house on top of the hill. It had a beautiful view. If you're on the highway just before you go up the hill, it's that big high house on the hill with the palm trees around it. In fact coming from Martini's winery you're looking right straight at it.
- Heintz: Oh, I've been up there.
- Did you ever increase the cooperage much more than 250,000?
- Rosasco: Not as long as we were there, when Gallo got in there [they increased it].
- Heintz: When did Gallo buy out? Were you still there when he bought out?
- Rosasco: Yes.
- Heintz: What year did he buy out?
- Rosasco: Completely? Well, he [Gallo] bought Tommy's share when he died about six or seven years ago.
- Heintz: Tommy who's that?
- Rosasco: Tommy Frei, that's Louie's son. And then Andy, he held onto his share until —I don't know maybe he has his share yet. I didn't get into that. I didn't have anything to do with it. But they're [Gallo] just about 100 percent in there now. Andy's



down in La Jolla now, he spends his winters down there. He has a breeding farm.

Heintz: Did Andy have some children?

Rosasco: A boy and a girl.

Heintz: I remember meeting a young Frei out at the winery seven or eight years ago. I think it must have been Andy's son.

Rosasco: They had Drew.

Heintz: That's right, I wonder what Drew's doing now.

Rosasco: Drew's in the real estate business, I bought this house through him. [laughs]

Heintz: He's got into real estate, that's interesting.

Do you think that Sargenti made wine every year during Prohibition? Have you any idea? Did they pretty much keep it open or did they make wine a couple of years and then close it down? Did anybody ever tell you about that?

Rosasco: No, nobody ever told me about that. And then during those years, they had a lot of Alicantes and a lot of Gran Noir and all those—that was shipped east.

Heintz: Yes, it brought a high price.

Rosasco: Zinfandel would bring 50 dollars a ton here, there it would bring 200 dollars a ton. But you had to put box [cost] in it too.

Heintz: Yes.

Rosasco: You see the box cost about—Well, when we were in Hopland, Prati always rented our cooler, because we had a great big hop kiln. He'd take all of his shipment up there in Mendocino County and he'd have two or three box people go and make boxes and he stored them in there. If he left them out in the sun they'd turn colors. He rented that place and they built them right there and the day they were ready to pick, they would have somebody there to take care of the boxes.

Heintz: Have you ever met or know anybody who worked for the Sargentis? Anyone that is still alive?



Rosasco: Well, the guys, I know that worked for him, were dog gone young. They wouldn't remember much.

Heintz: But if they worked there a year or two they might. Anybody around? I would just like to talk to them to see if they could tell me anything about Sargenti's operation. Whether they picked and shipped it all, what they did with it.

End of tape





Introduction to the Oral History Interview with:

**George Snider  
Dry Creek, Ca.  
May 15, 1979**

By William F. Heintz

There were in Dry Creek Valley, before Prohibition began in 1919-1920, dozens of wineries. The names have all but been forgotten now. It takes someone like native George Snider to recall and verify that Dry Creek once had so active an historical wine making industry.

Snider was born in 1901, he was almost 80 years old when this interview was conducted. His recall of names was surprisingly good, especially if he were asked about some long-departed vintner or grape growing family.

Snider humorously observed during the interview: "I'm a mile from home after 78 years." Actually he worked for Standard Oil Company from 1925 to 1945 at Richmond, before returning to Dry Creek Valley and resuming farming.

Before Prohibition the Snider family sold their grapes from approximately 50 acres to the "Reimers" Winery, and that family farm eventually had three wineries on it before 1920. One was owned by a married daughter, the "Plasberg" Winery.

"Frei—oh yea. We used to sell to them, too," recalled Snider. Frei was the largest winery at the time, followed by the first Reimer winery. On Dutcher Creek Road, the Sniders sold grapes to the Patronack Winery. "The oldest winery on Dry Creek, I have been told, before my time, was Wagele," claims Snider. "That was the first land planted. They (Wagele) died off. Duvall Bell married the daughter. Here about 25 years ago, he asked me, I'd done some carpenter work. . . if I could go up and put a new foundation under his old house." Snider was astonished to find still preserved on the basement walls, notations regarding the sale of Wagele wine to the Skaggs Springs resort.

The real purpose for the visit to Snider to was seek background information on the early operation of the Frei Winery. (This was for a project requested by the Gallo Winery after they purchased Frei.)

Snider recalls the Frei Winery having wine in it during Prohibition and producing wine many years. He was a close friend of Charles Sargenti. That family leased the Frei Winery during the early 1920's. Snider often was treated to a glass of Frei wine when he visited.

"During Prohibition, they shipped all over the states, that Sacramental wine. I can't prove anything, but I can remember things like that." There seems some serious confusion whether Sargenti's had a sacramental permit.



Revenue agents visited the Frei/Sargenti winery on at least one occasion and seized wine.

The scope of this interview was, unfortunately, limited to the period before Prohibition and up to about 1945. No viticulture history after that period is covered.

From a personal standpoint the Snider interview is one of the most important I've recorded because of a single observation about Prohibition by Snider. Snider claims that often wine was sold illegally out of wine tanks and if the Revenue agents were coming to inspect the winery's contents, wine tanks mysteriously burst. This was a common occurrence according to Snider: "Yes, I know of several cases where that happened." This is but one more example of how the wine industry "coped" with Prohibition.



Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County Oral History Series

**George Snider**  
Dry Creek Valley Rancher

Interviewed by William Heintz  
3517 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, California  
May 15, 1979

Transcription by Gail Ryan, 1993

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- William Heintz: Today's date is May 15th, 1979. I'm at 3517 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, Dry Creek Valley. Your first name Mr. Snider?
- George Snider: George.
- Heintz: May I ask your birthday?
- Snider: March 3rd, 1901.
- Heintz: So you're 77 years old.
- Snider: 78 almost 79.
- Heintz: You were mentioning that Mrs. (Patricia) Schmidt is your cousin?
- Snider: Second cousin, her father was my first cousin. Her grandfather married my aunt.
- Heintz: I was talking with Mr. Stefani, Mr. and Mrs. (George) Stefani, this morning and I said, "You have to be very careful around here what you say, because everybody's related."
- Snider: It used to be, we were all related. Now there's so many people buying and coming in here.
- Heintz: Where were you born?
- Snider: Up the road, just a mile. I'm a mile from home after 78 years.
- Heintz: So you were born in Dry Creek Valley too. What was your father's name?
- Snider: George.
- Heintz: And your mother's maiden name?





- Snider: Campbell.
- Heintz: What was her first name?
- Snider: Annie.
- Heintz: Did you have any brothers and sisters?
- Snider: Yes, six of them.
- Heintz: I would like to know some of the background. What were their names?
- Snider: My oldest sister was Evelyn, then Jack, my brother, than me and then Maud, my sister and then Ruth, my sister, and Kathleen, my sister and Walter my brother.
- Heintz: How many of them are still alive?
- Snider: All of us.
- Heintz: Do they live around here?
- Snider: No, I've got one sister in L.A., one in Lake County, and a brother in Arcata and one in Salinas, a sister, and the other three of us live around Healdsburg.
- Heintz: What is your wife's maiden name?
- Snider: Swindell.
- Heintz: Was she born in Sonoma County?
- Snider: She was born in Cloverdale. I worked down at Standard Oil for twenty years and I met her down there.
- Heintz: When did your father come to Dry Creek?
- Snider: My grandmother came here in 1854. He [my father] was born around '70 or '75.
- Heintz: And grew up here. You said you were born about a mile from where you live now. Your father had that ranch?
- Snider: Yes, he had that ranch and then one up in the hills out in Pena Creek.
- Heintz: Pena Creek, where the Pena Adobe is?



- Snider: The creek comes into Dry Creek there, but it's way back in the hills where it [Pena Creek] starts. The adobe belongs to the Phillips.
- Heintz: Were you raised as a child and a young man on your father's farm?
- Snider: Yes.
- Heintz: When did you buy the property that you have now?
- Snider: Well, I didn't buy it. [chuckles] My uncle gave it to me. Left it to me. You see I went down to Standard Oil. I got tired of working there so I came back up here and got a ranch and my uncle was getting older, wanted me to run the ranch. I didn't know whether to or not. Finally he was going to sell it and I said "Give me first chance at it." So it went on for a little while and he turned around and said, "I'll move to town, so you go up there and take the ranch." So he turned it over to me.
- Heintz: When you were a young man did your father have grapes?
- Snider: Yes, grapes and prunes at that time.
- Heintz: So as a young boy you helped in the vineyard?
- Snider: Oh yes, prunes, grapes and we had hay land for the horses, and corn.
- Heintz: How many acres of grapes did you have?
- Snider: My father's and he ran my grandmother's part, there were about 50 acres of grapes.
- Heintz: Is that about as many as you had right up to Prohibition too? When you were in high school—a teenager?
- Snider: Yes, that was about the most, right about that time.
- Heintz: What kind of grapes or varieties?
- Snider: Carignane and Zinfandel and four or five acres of Burgers.
- Heintz: [Burgers] That's an old time grape.
- Snider: Yes, I remember my grandmother down at her house had a patch of Missions and she had different kinds of table grapes.



- Heintz: Did the Mission produce pretty heavily?
- Snider: Yes. They were pretty good. I don't know why they didn't keep on—they made a light colored wine.
- Heintz: Did the grapes not have good color pigment in the skin?
- Snider: It's between a white grape and a Zinfandel color.
- Heintz: So there wasn't a good heavy colored pigment in the Mission?
- Snider: No.
- Heintz: Is that true of everybody's Mission?
- Snider: I guess so. I liked them so well I got some cuttings somewhere and I got a couple out here by the house. I don't know what happened. We made a little wine out of the Mission and I thought it was real good, of course, I was a kid then.
- Heintz: Where did you generally sell your grapes?
- Snider: We sold to Simi Winery. I remember when I was just a little kid I was riding on a four horse wagon down there with my dad to unload the grapes at Simi. We sold to Reimers. They had a winery. Do you remember that winery, the old, old winery?
- Heintz: Yes.
- Snider: And then when they split the ranch up, they had three wineries on that ranch. The big old winery up in the canyon there and the John Reimer's had a winery and Mrs. Plasberg, the daughter, had a little winery at that time.
- Heintz: I'd like to come back to that because I'm interested in the Reimers. You sold to them before Prohibition before 1919, when you were a teenager, was there anyone else? (Henry) Hollengren?
- Snider: Hollengren's way up Dry Creek.
- Heintz: He's quite a ways up there. [North end of Dry Creek Valley near new Lake Sonoma.]
- Snider: No, I don't remember, we never got very far from home in those days.





Heintz: Pedroni?

Snider: Pedroni's across Dry Creek.

Heintz: How about Frei?

Snider: Frei—oh yes. We used to sell to them too, I remember them.

Heintz: Did they buy very many grapes or just a few?

Snider: Frei bought a lot of grapes and they had a lot of grapes.

Heintz: He was a big operator wasn't he?

Snider: Yes.

Heintz: Who was the biggest winery in Dry Creek Valley?

Snider: I guess Frei was, near as I can remember. Or Simi, but that's not in Dry Creek. I think Frei was the biggest one. Reimer's winery was pretty big at that time. Well, let's see, oh, I don't know whether their main winery, I guess it went out of business before Prohibition. Then Plasbergs built one and John Reimer built one on his part.

Heintz: The winery that Chris Fredson operates now at the entrance to Dry Creek Valley, who owned that?

Snider: Somebody from San Francisco bought it.

Heintz: Who built it?

Snider: I know Massoni and Belli, run it, owned it for a while.

Heintz: I don't know those names, they must go back to the turn of the century, it goes back a few years.

Snider: I think it was built after I was born.

Heintz: Do you think it was built before Prohibition?

Snider: Yes, before Prohibition.

Heintz: How about Gaddini? Do you remember the Gaddini family?

Snider: Was that Dry Creek, the Gaddini family, no.



- Heintz: Let's go back to your youth. Your father sold his grapes sometimes to Simi, sometimes to Frei Brothers, sometimes to Reimers.
- Snider: Buyers would come around and offer so much. They'd take your grapes with them and then they would pay you later. They come around and buy your grapes and write up a contract in them days—so much.
- Heintz: Were there quite a few wineries in Dry Creek in the early years?
- Snider: Yes. There was one off Dutcher Creek — Canyon Road, I think my dad sold up there. It used to be years and years ago, Patronack.
- Heintz: Oh, Patronack, that rings a bell.
- Heintz: How about Borden's?
- Snider: Borden, I don't remember a Borden.
- Heintz: Patronack Winery was on Dutcher Creek Road?
- Snider: I'm sure that's it.
- Heintz: I have this wine magazine I read every so often [that mentions] the F. Schmidt Winery built in Healdsburg....Kinners and Patronack wineries in Dry Creek are both being enlarged. This was in 1902.
- Snider: I don't remember Kinners. The oldest winery on Dry Creek, I have been told, before my time, was Wagele.
- Heintz: They go back to the 1880's.
- Snider: Yes, that was the first land planted. They died off. Duvall Bell married the daughter. Here about 20 or 25 years ago, he asked me, I'd done some carpenter work, he wanted to know if I could go up and put a new foundation under this old house. It had been built on redwood puncheons, used just like planks, timber, you know laid on the ground and the house was built on that after 75 or 100 years it had rotted out. And he wanted to know if could go up and put a new foundation under it. So I did. It was in the basement it was up about this high, there was written all around on the walls in there, *Skaggs Springs Stage stopped, picked up so many gallons of wine and the date*. It might still be there if they haven't remodeled that.



- Heintz: Who has the Wagele house now?
- Snider: I don't know who's bought it now. I don't know that their name is.
- Heintz: Do you remember a Kelley Winery in Dry Creek?
- Snider: I remember it. I'm trying to place where the winery was. It seemed to me that Kelley's had a winery.
- Heintz: Do you remember the Geyser Peak Winery running it or leasing it for a while?
- Snider: No.
- Heintz: I have a reference to the Kelley Winery as being run by the Geyser Peak Winery people.
- Snider: I can't place it. That must have been torn down a long, long time ago. Or burned up or something, I don't remember it. We went to school right there by the Kelly place, unless there's another Kelley somewhere. [location that is presently between Waltenspiels Timber Crest Farms & Teldeschi's on Dry Creek Road, school was on the knoll.]
- Heintz: I've only heard of one.
- Snider: I can't place where the winery was.
- Heintz: Do you remember Dominic Lencioni?
- Snider: I remember Lencionis. They had this winery over on Lytton Springs Road.
- Heintz: How about in Dry Creek?
- Snider: [Lytton Springs] That's right off of Dry Creek [Road][still in Dry Creek Valley].
- Heintz: Weren't there two Lencioni families? There was Dominic—
- Snider: —and Fred. Angelo was the father of Fred and Dominic. The one I knew was a brother to Fred. Maybe he was named after an uncle or something. Angelo built a winery on Lytton Springs Road.
- Heintz: Wasn't it called Sunnyside Winery for a time?





- Snider: I don't remember it called that.
- Heintz: Wasn't there another winery down in Dry Creek that Dominic had—built right into the side of a hillside?
- Snider: Angelo's was built in the side of a hill. Dominic was the son of Angelo.
- Heintz: How about a Covalli [Winery]?
- Snider: They had a winery across Dry Creek on the other side years ago. There were so many little wineries. Like that place up there [Wagele's] that had a winery in the basement. You can't remember [them all], if you had a picture of a winery, the crusher and all that [you could] but if it was in their basement you never saw it.
- Heintz: You don't recall whether the Covalli's had a winery over at their place. It may have been a very small little operation.
- Snider: Yes. All the big wineries, I remember them.
- Heintz: August 31, 1907—this is the same kind of little newspaper, "Two new wineries are now in the process of construction in Dry Creek, one built by Mr. Covalli on the old Bowman place and a winery for A. Lencioni."
- Snider: 1907. That's right after the earthquake. That must have been Angelo.
- Heintz: Yes. That must have been the one up on the hill.
- Do you remember a man by the name of Frank Petray or R. H. Bagley?
- Snider: Bagley? Yes, I knew Bagley. My dad rented their winery and crushed his grapes. The winery was just below the store right there.
- Heintz: Just below the Dry Creek Store?
- Snider: It joined— the winery and the store belonged (together) it was all the same property at that time.
- Heintz: Are there any Bagleys left in the community?
- Snider: I don't think there is one. Oh, let's see, a great-grandson, I don't know where he is. He's the only one alive that I know of the Bagley family. Weaver Bagley, he died a few years ago,



he lived over here. One son was killed in the war and the other son went kind of haywire.

Heintz: The Bagley Winery, was that just a wooden building?

Snider: Yes.

Heintz: It probably doesn't exist?

Snider: No, it's all gone, it's been gone for years.

Heintz: Were you around in 1919 when Prohibition began?

Snider: Yes.

Heintz: Was the Bagley Winery still around?

Snider: I don't know what year that was. It was before that that my dad and Lloyd Blazer lived up there. They just weren't buying any grapes. They offered six, seven—I remember one year the grapes sold for \$8 [a ton]. One year they [father & Blazer] just decided to fix up the old winery and crush their own. I don't remember whether they made anything by crushing their own or not. I don't know how that turned out.

Heintz: I have a news story that says F. F. Patronack has purchased the old Reuteler ranch.

Snider: I don't know.

Heintz: Schnitzger ranch?

Snider: Schnitzger? I don't know which ranch they owned. They used to call one of the ridges up here the Schnitzger Ridge.

Heintz: Do you remember Robert Borner?

Snider: No.

Heintz: What about Thompson Brothers?

Snider: Yes, they had a ranch up here, but I don't remember them. They were pretty old when I was a kid.

Heintz: How about Bourdens at Skaggs Springs [winery]?

Snider: I recall the name, they lived somewhere near Board Bridge. There was no land up in there for vineyards. There's some in



upper Dry Creek, maybe that's where his ranch was, upper Dry Creek past the bridge, the Thompsons are up in there.

Heintz: When 1919 and 1920 came along, what happened to the wineries here?

Snider: Some of the wineries crushed grapes but most shipped the grapes east.

Heintz: They got pretty good prices right?

Snider: Yes, all of a sudden grapes went up high. The Alicantes [Alicante Bouschet], the people back there [East Coast] wanted that grape. The Jewish people made their red wine out of it. It made the worse wine, just like paint. Then the price of Alicantes went way down. I finally got smart and bought Zinfandel and Carignane, we didn't have all the fancy grapes then.

Heintz: Did any of the wineries in Dry Creek operate here during Prohibition?

Snider: Yes, the Freis operated and—

Heintz: How do you know they operated for sure, did you take grapes over there?

Snider: I know Charlie [Sargenti] got arrested. The Sargenti Brothers ran it for Freis. The Prohibition officers—a young fellow, he was well known around here. He got another officer, they got some girls and went over there [to Frei winery], that was the story I heard from Charlie. Charlie treated them, then they wanted to buy some wine, they tricked him. They got this half a gallon, Charlie said he would give them a half a gallon, Charlie wouldn't take the money, they said this fellow put the money in his pocket, and they turned around and arrested him for bootlegging. It either cost him a lot of money to get out of it or he served some time.

Heintz: Is he still alive?

Snider: No, no they are all dead, Charlie and Bob Sargenti.

Heintz: They ran the Frei winery?

Snider: Yes, they ran it for years.

Heintz: Why didn't the Freis run it?





- Snider: They had their apple orchard down there [Sebastopol], I don't know why they didn't run it.
- Heintz: Do you recall visiting the Frei winery?
- Snider: Oh yes, I used to go over and have a drink with Charlie all the time. [Laughter]
- Heintz: You were good friends with him. How many years did they make wine? Was he crushing some every year?
- Snider: I'm sure. They had wine all the time.
- Heintz: They had their own grapes?
- Snider: They had a big vineyard back there.
- Heintz: In the 1920's they had about a 100 acres didn't they? What did they do with their grapes?
- Snider: Crushed them I think, they might have shipped some.
- Heintz: The winery after the first year or two must have been filled, then where did they crush—
- Snider: Shipping wine for Sacramental purposes.
- Heintz: Did you think they had a Sacramental permit?
- Snider: Oh, yeah, they had a permit for that. They didn't have a permit to sell.
- Heintz: You mean that the winery had a Sacramental permit?
- Snider: Yes, there were several wineries that had that permit for making wine.
- Heintz: What churches bought their wine?
- Snider: Catholic I guess was the main one, and I guess there was some others. [chuckles] I remember my dad telling a story, during Prohibition a priest came up Dry Creek, I guess he used more wine than for Sacramental purposes, to buy some wine. I guess from someone who was bootlegging. When he went back, he ran off the bridge down there by the railroad track. When they went to help him out he had several jugs of bootleg wine floating around in his car. [laughs]



- Heintz: Where had he come from?
- Snider: Somewhere on Dry Creek.
- Heintz: This was a priest?
- Snider: Yes.
- Heintz: It wasn't from Frei's?
- Snider: No.
- Heintz: I need to be specific, I can't be vague, you were good friends with Charlie Sargenti. You used to go over there lots, maybe have a drink of wine.
- Snider: Yes, I went over there alot. We would drink and eat cheese and salami and talk.
- Heintz: So you were over there maybe once a month.
- Snider: Oh, yeah, I run a ranch up there that adjoined them in the back.
- Heintz: What was the name of the ranch?
- Snider: Gibson.
- Heintz: So you would go up there alot, and you think that during the '20s they crushed for altar wines.
- Snider: During Prohibition, they shipped all over the states, that Sacramental wine. I can't prove anything, but I can remember things like that.
- Heintz: Why do you think you remember them shipping all over, did you see them taking tank loads or puncheons down to the railroad and loading it for selling? Or did Charlie say we're shipping a whole bunch of wine this week?
- Snider: It's a little confusing, whether if that was Prohibition or before.
- Heintz: That can easily get mixed up. Is there anyone alive today that may have worked for Sargentis?
- Snider: I can't think of anyone. There aren't many of the old-timers left anymore.



- Heintz: That's the problem.
- Snider: I guess I'm the oldest old-timer in Dry Creek even the Italians that come over here to work in the wineries, the old-timers are all gone.
- Heintz: What about Mr. Rosasco?
- Snider: Rosasco, George? George Rosasco used to run Frei's for years and years.
- Heintz: Did he work there while the Sargentis had it?
- Snider: No, he didn't work for Sargenti.
- Heintz: Do you have any idea when XXX [?] came, because that is a fascinating story when Charlie Sargenti was arrested?
- Snider: That was—21 or 22. Clear as I can remember. Because I was 21 or 22 about that time.
- Heintz: Did you ever work for them during crush?
- Snider: No, I never worked for them. I worked for my dad and had this other ranch up here, Gibson.
- Heintz: How about after Prohibition—the Sargentis had gone, but 1933 they were not running the winery. Did the Freis come back and run it?
- Snider: Yes, then George Rosasco, he was the foreman.
- Heintz: During Prohibition, the only winery you can think of that sold altar wine in Dry Creek was Frei Brothers?
- Snider: The only one that was run legally, I think. [chuckles]
- Heintz: Were there some run illegally?
- Snider: Yes.
- Heintz: Why couldn't you put water in the top and take the wine out the bottom. Who the hell would know the difference?
- Snider: You mean have a double tank?
- Heintz: No, I mean after awhile it would all get real thin, but why couldn't you drain half a tank, 5000 gallons and then fill it back up with water. It would be colored and—





- Snider: I know about some that the tank would bust. They had got them down so far and they were coming around to inspect them. And they would find that something happened to the tank, it would bust or something like that and it would all run down the sewers. So they couldn't tell how many gallons that went down the sewer, they had sold all of it except enough to color the ditch or whatever it was running down.
- Heintz: I've never heard that.
- Snider: Oh, yeah. I can't prove it, but everybody knew what happened. We'd joke about it.
- Heintz: Another wine tank burst at so and so winery—
- Snider: Yes, I know of several cases where that happened.
- Heintz: In 1933, December, Prohibition ended. Where were you living in 1934?
- Snider: Richmond, I worked down there for Standard Oil for twenty years. I went down there in 25 and came back in 45.
- Heintz: So you weren't around here in the late 30s?
- Snider: No. Oh, I was back and forth all the time.
- Heintz: Were there any other wineries in the thirties, besides the Frei Brothers, before World War II?
- Snider: There was Plasberg's—
- Heintz: Let's talk about that, you were saying something to me about the Reimer's wineries, that there were three wineries on the property.
- Snider: After they divided the ranch up there were three wineries on there. The old winery, I think that they did away with that one. It was run by steam.
- Heintz: The Plasbergs—
- Snider: His wife owned it, the family built it.
- Heintz: What kind of a winery was it?
- Snider: Just a small one.



- Heintz: What do you think it was, 10,000-20,000 gallons?
- Snider: I'd guess they must have had 20,000 gallons.
- Heintz: Where's this at and who owns this property now?
- Snider: It was just sold. Mrs. Plasberg—Mr. & Mrs. Plasberg, died quite a while ago and the boy, Bob, he died a few years ago, and there's one boy, he lives in town. When Bob died, the ranch went to his wife, I guess, and she died a couple years ago and I heard that the place had sold. It went up for bids.
- Heintz: Do you think the winery operated before Prohibition or after?
- Snider: Probably before.
- Heintz: Not after?
- Snider: It might have operated after too.
- Heintz: What were some of the other ranches? You said that Reimers was divided up, one of the sons got part of it—
- Snider: Yes, John Reimer got part of it and he built a winery. And George Reimers got the part with the old winery on it, but I don't think he ran it.
- Heintz: I would like to ask you a couple of questions about some names.
- Snider: This place up there, the old Wagele place. The place that they claim was the first winery in Dry Creek, that would be interesting, I think if you could get the history of the valley.
- Heintz: Well, I know the Wageles I have quite a few things going way back.
- Snider: Have you been up to see her, Duvall Bell's wife.
- Heintz: No, they're on vacation and I can't get them, I've been calling and calling.
- Snider: She could tell you about that—cause Duvall, her husband when he had me fix their basement, he was telling me about it. I think he said it was the first winery. All this chalk writing on the wall about this four horse stage coming from Geyserville and taking people up to Skaggs Springs Resort. They would stop and get their wine.



- Heintz: Do you remember a winery at the Pedroncelli place before the Pedroncelli's came there?
- Snider: On Canyon.
- Heintz: Canata, Canata built it or something. [See Lillian Bagnani Oral History interview]
- Snider: I've heard that name.
- Heintz: John Pedroncelli didn't come up here until after Prohibition, did he? You weren't up here much but—
- Snider: No, I don't remember.
- Heintz: How about the Albert Giovanni Winery? How about Frank Bella?
- Snider: Bella? Belli, they had the tin winery down here that's the only one I know.
- Heintz: [In the article] It says past the Yoakim ranch near Skaggs. Both Mr. and Mrs. Stefani said that the Bella Winery was past the Yoakim Ranch near Skaggs [Springs]. But maybe they operated that, maybe they are talking about the tin winery.
- Snider: Fredson owns it [tin winery] now.
- Heintz: This is a 1937 directory of all the wineries, let's see if there's a Massoni. There's no Massoni.
- Snider: Well, maybe they were just partners. I know they worked together. One of them might have owned it and the other just worked there, at the tin winery. I know dad hauled grapes down there.
- Heintz: How about Biocchi Winery?
- Snider: No.
- Heintz: [Reading] Frank Bella, Healdsburg, California.
- Snider: This Belli I know, it wasn't Frank. They might have just have leased that. There was a winery up Board Bridge up there, Thompson. Does it [the directory] say anything about a Thompson?
- Heintz: The Thompson Brothers, yes.





- Snider: They were up above the bridge.
- Heintz: Charles Thompson.
- Snider: I remember whiskey guys coming down the mountain with horse and wagon.
- Heintz: I know somebody said they were quite old. [Reading] The Mazzoni winery, The Healdsburg Wine Company.
- Snider: Mazzoni, M-a-z-z-o-n-i?
- Heintz: It just says Mazzoni Wine Company. George Stefani said Mazzoni ran the Healdsburg Wine Company and he said that was right in town. He said, "That the reason I remember, was that I was selling wine for the Geyserville Growers—"
- Snider: That was the one that was on Grove Street.
- Heintz: It could be. Did Ed Norton have a winery after Prohibition.
- Snider: No.
- Heintz: How about Amelia Oneta.
- Snider: I've heard of Oneta, but I can't think of where they were. Were they supposed to be Dry Creek too?
- Heintz: Sebastianio Perioni.
- Snider: All these Italians—must have had a winery in their basement. [laughs]
- Heintz: Rafanelli's had a winery.
- Snider: Rafanelli over on West Dry Creek, he has one now.
- Heintz: His father had one before him?
- Snider: On Dry Creek?
- Heintz: He's listed here in the directory.
- Snider: He hasn't been over here for long. [See WLASC interview on Dry Creek Growers (original winery was in Healdsburg, they also owned land in Dry Creek Valley)]
- Heintz: Well, maybe in another location.



- Snider: Yes, it must be another place as he bought that place from Foppianos quite a few years ago, but after Prohibition.
- Heintz: You used to come up here after Prohibition and then in 1945 you came back. In 1945 you came back to this house?
- Snider: I lived in town for a while, until my uncle wanted to give up farming.
- Heintz: Were there any wineries in Dry Creek in the 1940s? Where did you sell your grapes?
- Snider: Frei took them.
- Heintz: Was he the biggest purchaser then on Dry Creek?
- Snider: Yes, I think he was the biggest one on Dry Creek. The tin winery, no that was before, they were shut down for years and years. They just started up when they built this new freeway over in the Valley [Alexander], they [Fredson] moved over here.
- Heintz: I would sure like to know the names of who built that winery, I know it must go back before Prohibition. The style of it too, it's redwood, the traditional winery of the pre-Prohibition days.
- Did you pull out any of your grapes in Prohibition?
- Snider: No, my dad didn't. Of course I wasn't ranching then. My dad didn't. I know some old vineyards that pulled part of it up during Prohibition and put part of it in prunes.
- Heintz: How many acres of land is there supposed to be in Dry Creek that's farmed? Have you heard?
- Snider: No, I never did hear.
- Heintz: I've always wondered how many thousand acres.
- Snider: There must be records somewhere.
- End of Tape



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